

Exploring the Experiences of New Zealand Mothers Raising Intellectually Gifted
Children: Maternal Strains, Resources, and Coping Behaviours

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Abstract

Background: Parents raising intellectually gifted children are faced with unique challenges. To date, very little research has considered the impact the challenges associated with raising intellectually gifted children has on parents. Furthermore, the existing literature has largely overlooked the positive parental experiences relating to raising gifted children and the ways in which parents cope with challenges. This study explored the complex and multifaceted experiences of New Zealand mothers raising intellectually gifted children.

Method: Nine mothers of children aged 6 to 16 years-old, with a formal identification of intellectual giftedness, participated in a semi-structured interview about their challenging and positive experiences raising their gifted children, the perceived impact on their wellbeing, and their coping behaviours. Qualitative content analysis guided the data analysis.

Results: The Family Adjustment and Adaptation Response model (FAAR) was utilised to organise the results into strains and resources within four domains; psychological, family, social, and services. The findings indicated that mothers' wellbeing was adversely affected by numerous strains from multiple contexts. Mothers reported experiencing exhaustion, stress, and anxiety in their role raising their intellectually gifted children. Strains such as social isolation, stigma, and dealing with schools, family members, and professionals that lacked understanding and awareness of giftedness were prominent factors. Mothers expressed tremendous frustration with the education system and lack of support services. Additionally, all mothers reported positive impacts related to raising their gifted children, including, personal growth, benefits, and adaptive coping behaviours.

Conclusions: This research makes an important contribution to the paucity of research on the experience of raising gifted children by highlighting the impact on maternal wellbeing and the need for support, understanding and awareness for parents of the gifted across multiple contexts. Understanding the experiences of mothers of gifted children can assist health and educational professionals in providing targeted support for parents of

intellectually gifted children to ameliorate the daily strains and build on their existing strengths and capabilities.

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CHAPTER 1: Introduction

For all parents, raising a child is an experience full of triumphs, growth, and joys, as well as challenges and strains (Resch et al., 2010). Research has shown that raising an 'atypically' developing child can place extra demands on parents and this can impact negatively on parental well-being (Lai, Goh, Oei, & Sung, 2015; McConnell, Savage, & Breitkreuz, 2014; Resch et al., 2010; Weiss, MacMullin, & Lunskey, 2015). Scholars have described gifted children as an 'atypical' special needs population that may require modifications to parent, teach and counsel in order for them to develop optimally (Alsop, 1997; Morawska & Sanders, 2009; Silverman, 2013). Indeed, the Ministry of Education (2012) in New Zealand recognises the special educational, social, and emotional needs of gifted children by mandating that schools work to identify, assess, and modify the curriculum to meet the special needs of gifted children, just as it is a requirement for children with other special needs such as those with disabilities (Ministry of Education, 2012).

Although there is much research that considers the impact of parenting other 'atypical' children, for example children with intellectual disabilities, autism spectrum disorder, children with emotional and behavioural difficulties, and chronic health conditions (e.g. Lai, Goh, Oei, & Sung, 2015; McConnell, Savage, & Breitkreuz, 2014; Resch et al., 2010; Weiss, MacMullin, & Lunskey, 2015), there is a paucity of research on the experiences of parents of intellectually gifted children (Jolly & Mathew, 2012; Jolly 2018). When parents of gifted children have been studied, it has usually been for the purposes of examining the impact the parent has on the development of the gifted child (Colangelo & Dettmann, 1984; Freeman, 2013; Jolly & Matthews, 2012; Leana-Tascilar, Ozyaprak & Yilmaz, 2016; Olszewski-Kubilius & Thomson, 2014; Tai & Phillipson, 2012 Webb et al., 2007; Wu, 2008). Only a handful of studies have considered the impact of gifted children on the lives of the parent (Alsop, 1997; Free, 2017; Renati, Bonfiglio & Pfeiffer, 2017; Rimlinger, 2016).

There is some empirical evidence that parenting gifted children presents unique parenting challenges often not experienced by parents of typically developing children (Alsop, 1997; Keirouz, 1990; Morawska & Sanders, 2008; Morawska & Sanders, 2009). Gifted

children have a set of affective characteristics that may add complexity to their development (Blackett & Webb, 2011; Silverman, 2013), including a heightened intensity and sensitivity to their environment (Tolan & Piechowski, 2012), overexcitabilities (Daniels & Piechowski, 2009), asynchronous development (Alsop, 2003), perfectionism, difficulties finding and maintaining friendships, and underachievement (Silverman, 2013). The nature and extent of these challenges and the impact they have on a parent's well-being is currently not well understood

Challenges for parents of gifted children have also been found to originate from a lack of support and understanding in broader contexts such as extended family and friends, the community, and school professionals (Alsop, 1997). The lack of support for parents and misunderstanding that surrounds intellectual giftedness in New Zealand has been attributed to the egalitarian ideals, and the Tall Poppy Syndrome prevalent in society today (Delaune & Tapper, 2015). Furthermore, research has shown that society often holds negative attitudes toward exceptional academic ability compared to exceptional ability in music or sport, which is valued and celebrated in society (O'Connor, 2012). Indeed, parents of intellectually gifted students in New Zealand reported feeling embarrassed and some rejected the intellectually gifted labelled because they did not want their children exposed to negative judgements (Wong & Morton, 2017).

There are some indications from the research that has been conducted that these challenges may place parents raising gifted children at higher risk for parenting stress and anxiety (Free, 2017; Renati et al., 2017; Rimlinger 2016). Indeed, Rimlinger's (2016) study found that parents of intellectually gifted primary school children in Australia and the USA reported elevated levels of parenting stress and anxiety comparable to that reported by parents caring for children with developmental disabilities or severe behavioural problems.

A broad range of proximal and distal systemic factors have been related to the elevated parenting stress of parents raising gifted young children (Free, 2017; Renati et al., 2016). Renati and colleagues (2017) found that major sources of stress for parents of gifted children were from difficulties managing their child's behaviours, difficulties advocating for

educational modification, and a lack of support from friends and institutions. In addition to the stressors listed by Renati and colleagues (2017), Free (2017) asserted that the high stress exhibited by parents of gifted children in her study was exacerbated by the lack of social support available to them because of the stigma and stereotyping of giftedness in Australia.

With exploratory studies indicating that parents of intellectually gifted young children are impacted by numerous challenges, understanding the ways parents of gifted children cope with challenges and their positive experiences are warranted. An understanding of the complete experience of raising an intellectually gifted children would assist health and educational professionals in providing targeted support for parents of intellectually gifted children to ameliorate the daily strains and build on their existing strengths and capabilities. Furthermore, no literature has explored the experiences of parents of intellectually gifted older children and adolescents. With only one study exploring the experiences of New Zealand parents (Chellapan and Margrain, 2013) there is still much to be understood about the experiences of New Zealand parents of gifted children.

Many definitions and theories of giftedness have been espoused throughout history, and today it is acknowledged that there is no one definition that is universally agreed upon within the field (Cathcart, 2018; Dai, 2018; Moltzen, 2011). Historically giftedness was defined as cognitive advancement which developed due to innate processes and was fixed throughout an individual's life (Galton, 1869; Terman, 1916). Today, it is more often agreed to be both innate and learned; that is, giftedness is a combination of natural endowment and life experiences (Dai, 2018).

In an effort to provide guidance for professionals working with gifted children and families, the New Zealand Association for Gifted Children (NZAGC), giftEDnz: The Professional Association for Gifted Education, and the New Zealand Centre for Gifted Education (NZCGE) released a joint position statement defining giftedness in New Zealand (NZCGE, 2018). They asserted that:

Giftedness exists in Aotearoa New Zealand and has been defined by educators, parents, researchers and policymakers as a construct embodying

extraordinary potential and performance in all areas of human endeavour (NZCGE, 2018).

The focus on both performance and potential to perform to exceptional levels when compared to the same aged-peers is a key component of this definition (NZCGE, 2018). Additionally, the position statement acknowledges that giftedness is socially and culturally constructed and is found in every group in society regardless of their ethnicity, socio-economic standing, culture, gender, or disabilities (NZCGE, 2018). Although the position statement makes it clear that giftedness is multi-categorical and can encompass areas such as performing arts, leadership, cultural practices, and creativity (NZCGE, 2018), this thesis will focus on intellectually gifted children. Intellectual giftedness is not limited to one academic area; children can also be gifted in some or all academic areas or categories (NZCGE, 2018).

Using Gagne's theory of giftedness (Gagne, 2008), which espouses that 10% of all children are gifted and applying that to information from New Zealand school rolls, it is possible that gifted children comprise over 80,000 children currently accessing state education in New Zealand (Education Counts, 2019). If the parents of these children are feeling stress and anxiety, misunderstanding, and a lack of acceptance, support and information, then it is important to gain a better understanding of the experiences parents have that have shaped these feelings.

Finally, many terms are used to describe gifted children, for example, 'gifted', 'talented', 'exceptionally able', and 'special abilities'. For convenience and simplicity, in this thesis, 'gifted' has been utilised as the generic term to cover all discussion of children with exceptional abilities. Similarly, the words 'parent' and 'teacher' have been used to describe a wide group that may include caregivers, whānau/family members, teacher aides, principals etc. The term 'children' is also used to apply to the age range from 6 to 16-year-olds.

1.1 Rationale

Although there is some evidence that raising gifted children presents unique parenting challenges, the effect these challenges have on parental well-being is still largely unknown, and no research has considered the positive experiences parents have in raising their gifted children and the ways in which parents cope with the challenges they face. Parental voice has been afforded limited attention in the literature on giftedness with regard to their own needs. Furthermore, with only one New Zealand study focusing on parental experiences of raising intellectually gifted children, there is still much to be discovered from within a New Zealand context.

This study will extend the findings noted in the current literature on parenting gifted children by focusing on parents of intellectually gifted children across a broader age range (6-16 years), and by exploring their perceptions of the impact raising their gifted children has on their well-being and what coping strategies they utilise. Additionally, by examining parents' positive experiences and coping strategies, this study will provide a unique contribution to the literature on parents of gifted children.

The purpose of this study is to explore the impact of raising intellectually gifted children as expressed by the parents themselves. This thesis aims to address the following research questions:

- 1) What is the nature and extent of the challenges and joys parents experience raising their intellectually gifted children?
- 2) What impact does raising intellectually gifted children have on parental well-being?
- 3) What are the coping resources parents of intellectually gifted children employ?

1.2 Organisation of the thesis

The components of this thesis are presented in Table 1.1. Chapter 1 (this chapter) provides a general introduction and Chapter 2 provides an introduction to the concept of

intellectually giftedness and giftedness within a New Zealand context and reviews the literature addressing the impact of raising an intellectually gifted child on parents. Chapter 3 outlines the methodological approach of the study and Chapter 4 presents the results of the study. Finally, Chapter 5 provides a discussion of the key findings from the study and their implications, discusses the strengths and limitations of this research and makes suggestions for future research.

Table 1-1 Components of the thesis

Chapter	Title	Focus of the chapter
1	Introduction	This chapter provides the background of the thesis, key definitions, the research problem and the aim and purpose of the study, the research questions the study seeks to address, and the components of the thesis
2	Literature Review	This chapter discusses the definitional issues surrounding giftedness and presents the definitions guiding this study. An exploration of the characteristics of giftedness and the contextualization of giftedness within New Zealand society and the New Zealand education system is presented. This chapter reviews the literature on the impact of raising an intellectually gifted child on parents.
3	Methodology	This chapter describes and justifies the methodological approach adopted for this thesis. It then provides an overview of the participants, the measures and procedure for the study. Ethical considerations are presented and the data analytic approach adopted for this study are outlined.
4	Results	This chapter presents findings from the semi-structured interviews conducted with mothers of intellectually gifted children.
5	Discussion	This chapter begins with a discussion of the main findings in relation to the aim and purpose of the study. Implications of the research are described and limitations and areas for future research are presented.

CHAPTER 2: Literature Review

Although the primary aim of this review is a discussion regarding the experiences of the parents of gifted children, it is necessary to first explore what giftedness is. Therefore, this chapter begins by briefly exploring the definitions and concepts related to giftedness and the characteristics commonly associated with gifted children and adolescents. This is followed by an examination of the literature on the experiences of parents of gifted children, the challenges and joys, the impact raising a gifted child has on parental well-being, and how parents cope with any perceived challenges. Next, a discussion of the concept of giftedness within New Zealand society and the New Zealand education system is introduced. Lastly, the theoretical frameworks used to guide the understanding of the impact of giftedness on parents will be presented.

In order to explore the experiences of parents raising intellectually gifted children, it is necessary to discuss the concept of giftedness. A thorough discussion on the history of the conception of giftedness is beyond the scope of this chapter; therefore, what follows is a discussion of some of the main ideas, theories, and tensions surrounding the concept of giftedness within the fields of psychology and education. While it is acknowledged that contemporary understandings of giftedness are multi-categorical (Ministry of Education, 2012), this section will focus on definitions relating to intellectual giftedness, as it pertains to the focus of this research.

2.1 Giftedness: The Search for a Definition

Exactly what giftedness is has been the source of much debate for researchers and theorists in the fields of psychology and education for more than 100 years (Dai, 2009; 2018; Subotnik, Olszewski-Kubilius & Worrell, 2011). The number of definitions of giftedness has grown substantially over the last few decades as scholars have sought to understand, measure and explain giftedness (Dai, 2009; 2018; Subotnik, Olszewski-Kubilius & Worrell, 2011). The result is a broader range of understandings and categories of giftedness (for example see Gardner, 2011; Gagne, 2013; Renzulli, 2018; Sternberg, 1997), and scholars and

theorists are now further from developing a universally accepted definition of giftedness than ever before (Cathcart, 2018; Dai, 2018; Moltzen, 2011).

2.1.1 Giftedness as IQ

Initially, pioneering psychologists interested in exploring exceptional intelligence regarded intellectual giftedness as a natural genetically endowed intellectual ability that was significantly higher than average (Galton, 1869; Terman, 1925). Accordingly, seminal studies defined intellectual giftedness psychometrically, as a score on an individual or group administered intellectual ability (IQ) test which fell two standard deviations above the mean, thus placing the individual at or above the 98th percentile (Hollingworth, 1942; Pfeiffer, 2015; Terman, 1925). These scholars considered intellectual giftedness as something that was fixed and could easily be defined and captured (Dai, 2018) through IQ testing (Terman, 1925, Hollingworth, 1942).

Today, while it is agreed that IQ tests are generally regarded as reliable and valid assessments of general intelligence (Canivez & Watkins, 2016), they have been criticised for capturing only a narrow part of what intellectual giftedness is (Dai, 2018; Pfeiffer, 2015; Sternberg, 2018). Dai (2018), in his review on the concept of giftedness, argued that it is now widely accepted by researchers and theorists that giftedness is multi-dimensional and is influenced by both innate traits and environmental experiences. There is also no general consensus on the percentage of the population giftedness refers to. Theorists have described giftedness as relating to the top 2% (e.g. Terman, 1926) top 3-5% (e.g. Renzulli & Park, 2000) or top 10% of the population (Gagne, 2008; 2013).

Although most researchers have moved away from a narrow definition of intellectual giftedness based on percentile scores on IQ tests, clinical psychologist and researcher Linda Silverman (2013) stressed the importance of IQ testing to identify, understand and support children at both ends of the bell curve, noting similarities between intellectual disability and intellectual giftedness. Silverman purported that the further a child diverges from the mean IQ in either direction the greater the psychological differences (Silverman, 2013), alienation (Hollingworth, 1942), and difficulties in functional living and social skills (Wasserman, 2007).

Silverman (2013) maintained that giftedness, like intellectual disability, should be defined as atypical development, which is often noticed early in life and is relatively stable. Research has found that parents of intellectually gifted children frequently report noticing advanced development before the child's first birthday (Alomar, 2003; Gottfried, Gottfried, & Guerin, 2006; Louis & Lewis, 1991).

Research from the Gifted Development Centre indicated that intellectually gifted children often move rapidly through developmental milestones in the first three years of life (Silverman & Golon, 2008). Their research also found that when the IQ of family members of intellectually gifted children were documented, siblings were found to have IQ scores that fell within 5 to 10 points and parents and grandparents within 10 points of the gifted child. These results have led researchers to assert that when one child in the family is identified as intellectually gifted based on an IQ score, there is some probability that all members of the family will also be intellectually gifted (Silverman & Golon, 2008; Silverman, 2013).

Linda Silverman (2013) asserts that psychology has abandoned the gifted and the result is a lack of understanding about what intellectual giftedness is among practitioners. She argues that the American Psychological Association, graduate psychology programs, and undergraduate courses in the United States have paid little attention to giftedness. While there is no research within a New Zealand context to inform the attention paid to giftedness at university level within psychology, Moltzen and colleagues (2018) assert that within education, IQ tests are not widely accepted as a way to conceptualise and define high intelligence. The egalitarian ideals that are prominent in New Zealand society have contributed to the suspicion of IQ tests within the New Zealand education system (Moltzen, Jolly & Jarvis, 2018). In contrast to the lack of focus on giftedness within psychology, the field of education has maintained a strong voice within the literature and has informed the definitions and understandings of giftedness with New Zealand education.

2.1.2 Giftedness: Educational Perspectives

Many prominent definitions and theories of giftedness have been formulated with educational contexts in mind for the purpose of identifying and meeting the needs of gifted

children within the school system (Moltzen, 2011). In turn, the definition of giftedness adopted by a school or an education system will influence both the procedures used to identify students and the differentiation in the curriculum offered (Gross, 1999). Definitions that focus on ability or aptitude rather than achievement have been regarded as best practice within the literature as they recognise that not all gifted children thrive and achieve their potential within the regular classroom setting (Gross, 1999).

The New Zealand Ministry of Education is yet to adopt a national definition of giftedness; instead, each school is required to develop their own definition in consultation with the school board and community (Ministry of Education, 2012). To assist New Zealand schools with the task of formulating a school-wide conception of giftedness Riley, Moltzen and Deaver (2012) highlight three understandings of giftedness commonly found in the literature: 1) giftedness is exceptional or advanced development in relation to same-aged peers in one or more areas; 2) nature and nurture both play a role in giftedness; 3) giftedness does not discriminate and can be found in every culture, race, socio-economic status, gender, and in those with learning disabilities.

The New Zealand Ministry of Education (2012), in its resources on giftedness, highlights popular educational theories and definitions, such as Gagne's (2008; 2013) differentiated model of giftedness and talent, Renzulli's (2002) concept of giftedness and Gardner's (2011) theory of multiple intelligences. Understandings of giftedness based on Māori cultural conceptions (Bevan-Brown, 2003) are also highlighted. The fluidity of the concept of giftedness across cultures, time and people is a prominent feature of the New Zealand Ministry of Education's documentation on giftedness (2008; 2012).

Moltzen, Jolly and Jarvis (2018) and Cathcart (2018) question the effectiveness of the New Zealand Ministry of Education's decision to place the responsibility of defining giftedness onto individual schools. Research has found that the lack of a national definition has resulted in some schools in New Zealand providing their communities with no definition, while many schools did not have a definition that was deemed appropriate or responsive to the needs of their gifted community (Education Review Office, 2008; Riley & Bicknell, 2013).

Unlike New Zealand, the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA) has adopted Francoys Gagne's Differentiated Model of Giftedness and Talent (DMGT) (Gagne, 2008; Gagne 2013) as the prominent theoretical model for schools. ACARA (2019) contend that Gagne's model provides research-based definitions of giftedness and talent that are directly and logically connected to teaching and learning within an Australian context (ACARA, 2019). Gagne's work underpins gifted education in many parts of the world, and is appropriate for use within a New Zealand context (TKI, 2019).

Francoys Gagne's (2008; 2013) theory of giftedness has gained popularity due to its distinction between gifts and talents and the inclusion of both nature and nurture (Figure 1). Gagne (2013) defined giftedness as a natural, outstanding ability one is born with, which influences development in a way that places a child in the top 10% of his/her same-aged peers in one or many areas. His model defined talent as expert mastery in one or many areas through systematic, deliberate skill building whereby the individual performs in the top 10% of individuals also superior in the same field.

Gagne (2013) purported that gifts could be translated into talents through informal or formal learning, so long as environmental, intrapersonal and chance factors act upon the individual's developmental process in positive ways. Environmental influences include parents, families, teachers, peers, culture, and gifted services or programs. Additionally, characteristics of the gifted individual, such as personality traits, motivation, volition, and health are catalysts in development. The model represents how different factors impact on the outcome of a child's giftedness and talent.

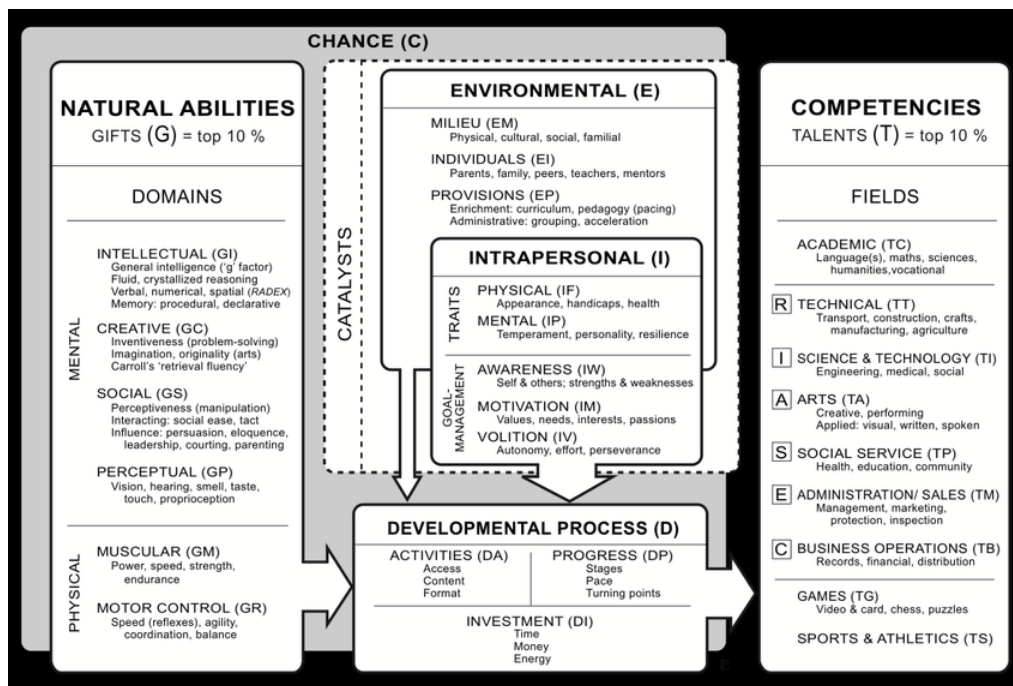


Figure 1 Gagne's Differentiated Model of Giftedness and Talent (DMGT 2.0; 2008 update)

2.2 Giftedness: A Holistic Definition

Gagne's definition of giftedness, much like other popular definitions of giftedness (Gardner, 2011; Marland, 1972; Renzulli, 2018) developed with educational contexts in mind, can be criticised for ignoring the experience of being gifted (Grant & Piechowski, 1999). It has been argued that educational theories and definitions of giftedness miss the characteristics of giftedness reported by parents (Hollingworth, 1942) such as heightened intensity, sensitivity, and overexcitabilities (Daniels & Piechowski, 2009).

One definition that considers how the gifted child thinks, feels, and experiences the world is that of Annemarie Roeper (1982). Roeper defined giftedness as "a greater awareness, a greater sensitivity, and a greater ability to understand and transform perceptions into intellectual and emotional experiences" (Roeper, 1982, p.21). Building upon the holistic definition of giftedness proposed by Roeper (1982), The Columbus Group, a group of experts on giftedness including psychologists, educators and parents, defined giftedness as follows:

Giftedness is asynchronous development in which advanced cognitive abilities and heightened intensity combine to create inner experiences and awareness that are qualitatively different from the norm. This asynchrony increases with higher intellectual capacity. The uniqueness of the gifted renders them particularly vulnerable and requires modifications in parenting, teaching, and counselling in order for them to develop optimally. (The Columbus Group, 1991 as cited in Tolan & Piechowski, 2012, p.21).

According to Alsop (2003), parents often endorse The Columbus Group definition of giftedness as it provides a more holistic description of the realities of giftedness. The definition goes beyond a score on an IQ test to explain some of the characteristics of giftedness parents report their children experiencing (Alsop, 2003). The Columbus Group definition also steers away from the common conception that intellectual giftedness equates to high achievement at school. Alsop (2003) asserts that the definition assists in understanding why “children endowed with the highest intellectual potential experience difficulties in both educational and social environments” (p. 7).

The definitions of giftedness presented in this section represent only a few of the many understandings of giftedness that have been purported in the literature. The lack of a unified understanding of giftedness can result in confusion for parents, teachers, psychologists, and communities who try to define giftedness (Keen, 2005). Furthermore, definitional issues impact upon research on giftedness resulting in considerable variation in populations of gifted participants in empirical research, making generalisation and comparison of results problematic (Martin, Burns, & Schonlau, 2010).

For the purposes of this study, the holistic definition of giftedness proposed by The Columbus Group (1991, as cited in Tolan & Piechowski, 2012) and the developmental perspective highlighted in Francoys Gagne's Differentiated Model of Giftedness and Talent (Gagne, 2008; Gagne, 2013) will be used to inform understandings of what 'intellectual giftedness' is, and to guide the exploration of parents' experiences of raising a gifted child. The Columbus Group definition applies to this study, due to its emphasis on the affective experience of the individual, one that explores 'being gifted' or 'living with' gifted individuals that cannot be explained by advanced development alone. Furthermore, the recognition

that the parental experience may not be 'typical' and may require modification and supports aligns with this study's investigation into these 'atypical' experiences. Additionally, Gagne's (2008) definition is valuable for this study as it provides a clear definition of intellectual giftedness, and highlights the importance of environmental transactions such as those between the parent and child.

It is possible that the qualitative differences commonly associated with giftedness as described in The Columbus Group definition could enrich the parental experience. Heightened intensity, overexcitabilities, asynchronous development, and cognitive exceptionality are often associated in the literature and through parent report as characteristics of gifted children that make the role of parenting more complex and demanding. It is possible that these characteristics could also provide positive parental experiences. There is scope for exploration of the nature and extent of joyful parental experiences and the impact on parental wellbeing within this study by utilising the Columbus group definition of giftedness as a basis for this exploration.

2.3 Characteristics of Gifted Children

Several researchers have found that intellectually gifted children often exhibit behavioural and affective characteristics that add a layer of complexity to the experience of parenting (Delisle, 2006; Webb, Gore, Amend & De Vries, 2007; Morawska & Sanders, 2008). Characteristics include a heightened intensity and sensitivity to their environment (Tolan & Piechowski, 2012), overexcitabilities (Daniels & Piechowski, 2009), asynchronous development (Alsop, 2003), perfectionism, and underachievement (Silverman, 2013). These behavioural characteristics occur so frequently in intellectually gifted children that they could be considered normal characteristics within the gifted population (Silverman, 2013). While it is accepted within the literature that these vulnerabilities do exist, Wardman (2018) highlighted the uncertainty about the direction of the effects. It is not apparent if the vulnerabilities noted in gifted children are a result of the characteristics associated with giftedness, or born from the interactions between gifted individuals and their environments (Wardman, 2018).

Linda Silverman, director of the Gifted Development Centre in the USA, collected data on 6000 gifted children over 30 years, establishing a cluster of characteristics commonly found in gifted children (Silverman, 2013). Silverman, Chitwood and Waters (1986) found, based on parent report that children displaying any 18 out of the 25 characteristics were highly likely to score in the gifted range on an intelligence test. Characteristics included reasons well, learns rapidly, extensive vocabulary, excellent memory, long attention span, avid reader, mature for age, sense of humour, sensitivity, concern with justice and fairness, and prefers older companions. While the list of characteristics has proven useful for identification and understanding intellectual giftedness, gifted children are not a homogenous group; each child is unique and may display a unique set of characteristics (Pfeiffer, 2009; Riley, Moltzen & Dreaver, 2012).

Riley, Moltzen and Dreaver (2012) asserted that gifted children's unique characteristics often resulted in the mastery of areas of the school curriculum before being explicitly taught the content, leading to many children finding school boring and unchallenging. Pioneering psychologist of the gifted, Leta Stetter Hollingworth (1942), found that in a regular primary school classroom, gifted children with an IQ of 140 wasted half their time in school, while children with an IQ of 170 wasted almost all their time. Silverman (2013) asserted that school could be difficult for gifted children if their insatiable appetite for learning is not satisfied within the regular classroom. Researchers in New Zealand agree, cautioning that if appropriate accommodations are not put in place, gifted children may become disillusioned with school and drop out of the system completely (Riley, Moltzen & Dreaver, 2012).

2.3.1 Asynchronous Development

Asynchronous development occurs when an individual's intellectual, social, emotional, and physical advancement occurs at different rates (Alsop, 2003). Asynchronous development is now widely recognised as 'typical' within intellectually gifted populations (Alsop, 2003; Kearney, 1992). Development that is out-of-sync; for example, a gifted eight-year-old may have the cognitive abilities of a fourteen-year-old, the social abilities of a twelve-year-old, and the physical and emotional development and motor skills of an eight-

year-old is associated with challenges for parents and children (Blackett & Webb, 2011). Parents note asynchrony as one of the most challenging aspects of parenting a gifted child (Alsop, 1997; Kearney, 1992, Silverman, 2013) as highlighted by the words of parent and author Jen Merrill (2012)

I never know exactly which age I am dealing with at any given moment. Imagine being a young child, feeling intense despair over the state of the world, and not understanding why other kids don't feel the same. Or having the reading comprehension of a much older child, but lacking the maturity to deal with the topics at that level. Or ... knowledge log-jams as you try to write about it because your writing skills lag far behind your racing intellect. In the span of a few minutes, I could have a child who looks his age, discusses cosmology and theoretical physics in great detail, whips out a few bars of his current favourite rock song, feels great existential despair over the unanswered questions of life, then behaves with the emotional maturity of a child half his age. It's parental whiplash. (Merrill, 2012, p.62)

2.3.2 Overexcitabilities

Closely associated with asynchronous development, and just as salient a factor in the lived experiences of the gifted, are overexcitabilities (Piechowski & Colangelo, 2004). Overexcitabilities are inborn intensities that result in a heightened ability to respond to stimuli (Daniels & Piechowski, 2009). Dabrowski (1972), a Polish psychologist and psychiatrist, introduced five areas of excitability: psychomotor, sensual, intellectual, imaginational and emotional. Overexcitabilities have been related to gifted children's tendency to experience stimuli more strongly, process more deeply, and experience the intensity of feelings for longer than typically developing populations (Bouchard, 2004; Chang & Kuo, 2013; Harrison & Haneghan, 2011; Silverman, 2013).

Psychomotor overexcitabilities can be evidenced by high levels of energy, enthusiasm, rapid speech, impulsivity, and sleeplessness, while sensory overexcitabilities can result in an acute awareness of sensory inputs eliciting strong responses to music, language and art or can result in an intense dislike of sensory information such as tags on clothing (Lind, 2011). Intellectual overexcitabilities are characterised by an intense drive to learn, understand, think and develop new ideas. Children with intellectual overexcitabilities are

often concerned with fairness, and ethical and moral issues from a young age (Daniels & Piechowski, 2009). Imaginational overexcitabilities can result in highly creative thought, daydreaming and dramatic expression, while emotional overexcitabilities are experienced and expressed through heightened empathy, feelings, emotions and affective responses (Daniels & Piechowski, 2009).

The intensity and sensitivity with which intellectually gifted individuals experience many aspects of life have been written about within the fields of education and psychology (Mendaglio & Tillier, 2006; Tucker & Hafenstien, 1997). In their review of the literature, Piirto, Montgomery, and May (2008), noted "one of the emerging ideas about academically talented students has been that they possess higher overexcitabilities- that they are more sensitive and intense than students who do not have high scores on IQ or achievement tests" (p.142). Lind (2011) concluded that a small amount of empirical research and a large amount of naturalistic observation have led to the assertion that overexcitabilities are a primary characteristic of gifted individuals throughout the lifespan. This assertion is also supported by parents and teachers, who have noticed behavioural differences between gifted children and their peers (Lind, 2011).

While overexcitabilities can influence outcomes positively, they can also result in behaviours that may be interpreted as undesirable (Daniels & Piechowski, 2009). Indeed, Webb and colleagues (2005) argue that parents, teachers and professionals mistake some of the behavioural and affective characteristics of gifted children associated with overexcitabilities and asynchronous development as symptoms of psychological disorders. Professionals receive little clinical training in giftedness; therefore, they may find it difficult to distinguish between behaviours that arise from giftedness compared to those that derive from diagnosable disorders (Hartnett, Nelson, & Rinn, 2004; Mullet & Rinn, 2015; Webb et al., 2005). As a result, Webb and colleagues (2005) purport that gifted children are sometimes misdiagnosed with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder, Depression, Autism Spectrum Disorder, Oppositional Defiant Disorder, and Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder.

Whether gifted individuals are at a greater risk for social and emotional problems and a range of other disorders has been the subject of much debate within the literature on giftedness. Some research has pointed to intellectual giftedness being a resilience or protective factor (Der, Batty, & Deary, 2009; Muller, 2009), whereas other research has shown it to be a risk factor for problems such as clinical level internalising and externalising behaviours (Guenole et al., 2013) and depression (Jackson & Peterson, 2003). While no consensus has been arrived at, recent research suggests that while educational and financial success is commonly correlated with high IQ, individuals whose IQ falls two standard deviations above the mean may be at increased risk of psychological disorders and physiological diseases (Karpinski et al., 2018). Karpinski and colleagues (2018) published research showing that, when compared to national average statistics, adults with an IQ at or above the 98th percentile reported significantly higher rates of diagnoses for mood and anxiety disorders, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, autism spectrum disorder, and physiological diseases that include environmental and food allergies, asthma, and autoimmune disease. Possessing a high IQ was related to two to four times greater risk of disorders and diseases than the general population. The results of this exploratory study led the researchers to propose that overexcitabilities within the gifted population result in a hyper-brain and hyper-body relationship.

2.3.3 Other Characteristics

Perfectionism is often related to intellectually gifted students. However, the research regarding the prevalence of perfectionism among gifted children compared to typically developing children has not been definitive (Neumeister, Williams & Cross, 2007). Underachievement is also commonly associated with intellectually gifted children and occurs when there is a discrepancy between an individual's potential in a certain domain and their current performance (Reis & McCoach, 2000). It seems that giftedness does not guarantee educational success with some research suggesting that up to 20% of students who drop out of high school may be gifted (Gross, 2006; Renzulli & Park, 2000).

While debate continues regarding the nature and extent of vulnerabilities that are experienced by intellectually gifted children and adolescents, the literature points to risk

factors that are salient for gifted children, including lack of challenge in the school curriculum, and limited or no access to other children who are gifted or have similar interests, abilities and drive (Neihart, Pfeiffer & Cross, 2016). Furthermore, parents can be overwhelmed by their children's intense way of seeing and feeling "too much", and this can lead to increased conflict between the gifted child and the family (Morawska & Sanders, 2009). Historically, children who experience intense feelings have been considered to have difficulties with emotional regulation, however, it is possible that intense feelings are also evidence of a rich inner life (Sword, 2011). As Piechowski (2006) eloquently described:

Emotional intensity in the gifted is not a matter of feeling more than other people, but a different way of experiencing the world: vivid, absorbing, penetrating, encompassing, complex, commanding- a way of being quiveringly alive... It is emotional intensity that fuels joys in life, passion for learning, the drive for expression of a talent area, the motivation for achievement (p.2).

This section of the chapter has provided a brief introduction to some of the tensions and definitional issues of giftedness within the fields of psychology and education. It is evident from the literature that no consensus has been reached to help families, educators, researchers, and practitioners formulate a collective and unified understanding of intellectually gifted children. What is evident from a review of the literature is the recognition of the psychological differences of intellectually gifted children. These differences provide some context for the need for differentiated parenting and the possibility of 'atypical' parenting experiences. The research concerning the impact of parenting gifted children, particularly the challenges and joys parents experience, the effect on well-being, and how they cope with challenges, is presented in the following section.

2.4 Parenting Intellectually Gifted Children

Most research on parents of gifted children has focused on understanding the impact of the parent on the gifted child, with current research finding parents to be instrumental in the academic, social and emotional development of gifted children (Cho & Campbell, 2010; Freeman, 2013; Garn, Mathews & Jolly, 2012; Jolly & Matthews, 2012; Leana- Tascilar, Ozyaprak & Yilmaz, 2016; Olszewski-Kubilius & Thomson, 2014; Tai & Phillipson, 2012; Wu,

2008). Only a handful of studies have considered the impact raising a gifted child has on the lives of parents (Alsop, 1997; Free, 2017; Renati, Bonfiglio & Pfeiffer, 2017; Rimlinger, 2016). This section will begin with a brief overview of the research that has been conducted on parenting a gifted child. Following this, an exploration of the literature examining the impact raising a gifted children has on the parent, as well as the literature on parental coping and the positive aspects of the experience of parenting intellectually gifted children will be examined.

From the literature reviews conducted on the parents of gifted children, it is evident that research which has sought to explore and understand these parents is scarce. Furthermore, much of the literature has been conducted within the US, with New Zealand and Australia contributing little to current understandings (Jolly, 2018). The nature and extent of the difficulties and joys parents of gifted children face is not well understood and the voices of the parents themselves are often missing from the literature. A review of 20 years of literature on parents and families of gifted children by Colangelo and Dettmann (1984) called for more research to be devoted to the needs of the parents and families of gifted children. They found most research conducted on parents of gifted children focused on how families can best support their child's talent development and ignored the needs or concerns of the parents. Colangelo and Dettmann (1984) urged attention to be given to the needs of parents of gifted children through empirical investigation. From the limited research available at the time, Colangelo and Dettmann (1984) concluded that parents of gifted children experienced unique challenges and problems that differed from those of other parents, they felt confused about their role as parents in the home and school settings, felt unprepared to raise a gifted child, and lacked knowledge on giftedness.

A recent review of the literature conducted by Jolly and Matthews (2012) argued that Colangelo and Dettmann's (1984) call for more research on the parents of gifted children had not been adequately answered in the intervening years. Since 1984 an average of two studies per year had been published on parenting gifted children (Jolly & Matthews, 2012). Most of the studies Jolly and Matthews (2012) reviewed focused on three areas: 1) parental influence, 2) parent perceptions of giftedness, and 3) parent satisfaction with gifted

programs. The needs of the parents, the parent's ability to cope with challenges associated with their child's giftedness, and parental well-being, although not mentioned by Jolly and Matthews (2012) as a limitation of the research, was noticeably absent from the studies they reviewed.

Jolly (2018) went on to consider the state of the current knowledge about parents of gifted children in her review of the literature. Her conclusions were similar to past reviews, there had still been little attention afforded to parents of gifted children in research and there was an urgent need for future research to explore all facets of parenting gifted children to better understand their experiences. She recommended focusing future research on examining parents' understanding of giftedness, the challenges in raising gifted children, the role of the home-school relationships, and parents' experiences of advocacy. This thesis aims to address some of these recommendations.

2.4.1 Impact on Parents

The first empirical investigation into the impact of giftedness on families was conducted by Alsop (1997). Alsop surveyed 42 families of intellectually gifted children in Australia to ascertain the need for parental counselling services. Considering the parent's experiences in three contexts; family and friends, community and school, Alsop concluded that counselling was needed to help parents of gifted children cope with the unique demands they face. Alsop's (1997) study highlighted the complications parents face in the larger community due to misunderstandings and stereotyping regarding their intellectually gifted children.

Although Alsop's (1997) findings indicated that parents were subjected to adverse experiences through their interactions with others across all socially important contexts, the study did not ask the parents to comment on how these interactions impacted their well-being. The sense of social isolation and frustration referred to in Alsop's (1997) study has been linked to stress in recent studies investigating the impact of raising gifted children (Free, 2017; Renati et al., 2017; Rimlinger, 2017). While it is acknowledged that most parents

experience stress, the findings from these studies indicate that the parents of gifted children may experience unique stressors across multiple contexts.

Renati, Bonfiglio, and Pfeiffer (2017) examined Italian parents' daily stresses through a community sample of 49 parents (23 = fathers, 26 = mothers) of intellectually gifted children aged between 6 and 10 years-old. Through individual semi-structured interviews and open-ended questionnaires, Renati and colleagues contended that the sources of perceived stress in these parents lives came from three levels; the child level, family level, and social level. Child level stressors for parents were noted as relating to gifted children's oppositional behaviour, difficulty with rules and routines, and problems managing emotions such as anxiety, inhibition, and sadness. At the family level, almost half the parent participants noted that a lack of parenting alliance was a major source of stress with parent's reportedly holding differing views of their child's giftedness and the best ways to manage behaviour. Some parents expressed difficulties with extended family, including challenges communicating with relatives about their child's giftedness. Stress was also related to financial issues linked to providing for the needs of their gifted child. A parent of an 8-year-old child was quoted about the financial impact of trying to find a good educational fit:

Our son was very intense and the regular classroom in our local public school was too much for him... the noise, the peers, and a curriculum that didn't challenge him at all. We tried to get him help by enrolling him in a private school, but it is very expensive. Our choice is to invest our money trying to support his educational needs but we don't know how long we can really do this (Renati et al., 2017, p.153).

At the social level, school was reported as a major source of stress by approximately half of the parents with many parents noting negative effects on them and their child due to the lack of a conducive parent-school alliance (Renati et al., 2017). The feeling of loneliness and social isolation was another major source of stress for parents at the social level. Thirty-nine percent of parents reported feeling alone and inadequate in their parenting, while 25% of parents reported receiving little support from friends and institutions. A mother of an 8-year-old described her experience of social isolation:

Other parents think that we believe that our child is better than other kids... they don't invite us to eat pizza with the class, they simply think we are arrogant and ambitious! No one asks me how I feel. Sometimes I would like to yell! We are isolated and I feel alone! (Renati et al., 2017, p.153).

The findings from Renati and colleagues' (2017) study indicated that parenting gifted child profoundly impacts the experience of parenting in ways that can negatively affect an individual's subjective well-being. The perceived stressors impacting upon the parents were noted as originating from multiple contexts across layers of the individual parents' ecosystem. Interestingly, this study's participants contained a similar number of mothers and fathers, something which is not often achieved in samples for studies based on parenting gifted children (Free, 2017; Rimlinger, 2016). The authors did not report the results separately, therefore, missing an opportunity to ascertain the similarities and differences in the experiences of mothers and fathers.

Sally-Ann Free (2017) conducted another recent qualitative investigation on the impact raising a gifted child has on Australian parents. Using semi-structured interviews with 23 parents (16 = mothers, 7 = fathers), Free (2017) explored what kinds of challenges existed for these parents and why they were significant. Similar to Renati's (2017) findings, Free (2017) reported that stress was a significant experience for the parents in her study, asserting that parental stress was exacerbated by the lack of social support and the sense of social isolation they experienced.

When examining the experiences of stress outlined by the parents in Free's (2017) study, it was found that identification of giftedness and educational issues were problematic for many parents and had a considerable negative impact on the parenting experience. Like the Italian parents in Renati's (2017) study, many parents reported feeling frustrated due to the antipathy of teachers toward their child's giftedness, and many regarded interactions with educators as a major stressor in their life. Feelings of frustration and anger were common, as parents expressed surprise that their child's needs were not recognised and catered for in the regular classroom, leading many to attempted to navigate educational policies and advocate strongly to have their children's needs meet.

When Free (2017) considered the social isolation experienced by parents in her study, she found her participants were impacted by the effects of tall-poppy syndrome, the 'pushy parents' label, and the stigmatisation of intellectual giftedness in Australian society. Free (2017) argued the stress reported by parent participants was influenced by Australian society's egalitarian ideals and that these views contributed to the misunderstanding and discrediting of the problem's parents of gifted children report. These societal attitudes towards giftedness were found to affect the support options available to parents from institutions, friends and family (Free, 2017). When society perceives raising gifted children to be an easy task, this myth can result in a lack of acceptance, understanding, and support for the problems many parents of gifted children face (Silverman, 2013). Free (2017) asserted that the negative attitudes of society toward the gifted influenced the meaning parents ascribed to giftedness. The parents in Free's (2017) study likened their child's giftedness to a disease, something that required intervention and attention, they did not liken it to a 'gift'.

Natalie Rimlinger (2016), in her doctoral thesis, also noted the difference between social expectations and the realities of parenting gifted children. She argued that this may be the most salient issue impacting upon the experience of raising a gifted child, writing "while it's hard to feel supported in your efforts as a mother or father if your child's needs are out of the ordinary, it's all the more stressful if no one believes you" (Rimlinger, 2016, p.155)".

Rimlinger (2016) conducted the first quantitative study exploring the psychological well-being of parents of gifted primary school children. By utilising common standardised self-report measures of depression, anxiety and parental stress she was able to compare her studies results to those of parents of typically developing children. Rimlinger's participants, 265 parents of gifted children in the US and 117 Australian parents, reported experiencing significantly higher levels of anxiety than the general population on the Depression Anxiety and Stress Scale (DASS). While parenting stress was reported to be elevated across both the Australian and US participants, the level of stress experienced was found to be significantly higher amongst the Australian parents.

Rimlinger (2016) noticed that the levels of parenting stress reported by parents in both countries were similar to the stress levels of parents of children diagnosed with developmental delay. Additionally, the levels of stress experienced by Australian parents were similar to those reported by parents of children with clinically significant behaviour problems. Rimlinger's results indicated that the experience of raising a gifted child is 'atypical', and that much like parenting other populations of children with difficulties, this experience can have a negative effect on the psychological well-being of parents. Rimlinger's research highlights the similarities between the wellbeing of parents of gifted children and parents of children raising other special needs populations. This is an observation made previously by clinicians (e.g. Silverman, 2013), but Rimlinger's research is the first to provide a quantitative comparison to other special needs populations.

Although Rimlinger's (2016) study primarily utilised a quantitative methodology through standardized questionnaires, she did include an open-ended question at the end of the questionnaire for parents to share any relevant comments or concerns. Interestingly, it is through these free responses that Rimlinger (2016) gained a greater understanding of some of the reasons for her parent's elevated levels of stress and anxiety. For example, the free responses highlighted that understanding and acceptance of the demands involved with parenting gifted children was not often afforded to the parents of gifted children, as this quote from an Australian mother illustrates:

People say 'What a shame' when someone's child is diagnosed with Asperger's. But when a child is found to be gifted, they say 'Oh well you don't have to worry about anything, your child is perfect'. But they don't realise there are some really difficult challenges with gifted kids, they are just different from those faced by the Asperger's parents. (Rimlinger, 2016, p. 146)

Another theme that came through strongly from the free responses was the issues of advocating for the gifted child who is not necessarily understood by their teacher and does not have access to an appropriate educational fit, as described by another Australian mother:

I think the core difficulty lies with the fact that being gifted is not seen as a special needs issue. If there was more official recognition of this as an issue then most people's problems would lessen overnight simply because they would not be perceived as pushy parents (Rimlinger, 2016, p.118)

The labelling of parents as pushy or the fear of being labelled as pushy as mentioned by the mother above was another common theme in the free responses. For example, one mother wrote:

Being labelled as pushy, having to put up with stuff from schools you wouldn't take from anyone else, ever (like being called a liar), each new teacher patronising me and as good as telling me I've got tickets on myself (Rimlinger, 2016, p. 118).

The finding in Rimlinger's (2016) study that parents of gifted children in Australia experienced higher stress levels compared to their US counterparts, supports the argument that the experience of parents of gifted children must be understood within the context and culture they reside. With this in mind, the author was only able to find one study that considered the experiences of New Zealand parents of intellectually gifted children. Chellapan and Margrain (2013) interviewed four sets of New Zealand parents of gifted children aged 3-8 years, with findings indicating that all parents in this study experienced misunderstanding around the difficulties raising a gifted child due to others not understanding the problems and concerns they had. Additionally, almost all parents had experienced negative judgements of both themselves and their children, and felt some social isolation.

Chellapan and Margrain's (2013) study found that the stigma of giftedness was a salient factor for parents of intellectually gifted children. Parents reported being fearful of the reactions from others if they mentioned their child's giftedness, as summed up by one mother "if you go out there in our society in New Zealand and say you have a gifted child people will look at you like who do you think you are? You know people would judge you immediately when you say your child is gifted" (p. 135). Although this study presents concerns similar to those highlighted in the studies reviewed, it does not explore

these parent's perception of the impact these concerns could have on their well-being, the way in which parents cope with these challenges or the positive aspects of their experiences.

Parent's health and well-being is not only critical for themselves, but also critical for the healthy development of their family and the community (Davis et al., 2010). The notion that the nature of parenting gifted children is qualitatively different from parenting typically developing children has emerged from within the limited literature focusing on the experience of parenting gifted children (Alsop, 1997; Free, 2017; Rimlinger, 2017, Chellapan & Margrain, 2013; Renati et al 2017). For some parents, raising gifted children can have a negative effect on well-being. Empirical investigations into the nature and extent of the impact of raising a gifted child on parental well-being is in its infancy and there is still much to be explored. Recent research has indicated that parents of intellectually gifted children often experience a lack of support from family and friends, professionals, school staff, and the community (Free, 2017). With the people and places parents would usually seek support from often a source of stress for parents of gifted children (Free, 2017), where do the parents of gifted children go for support and how do they cope with the unique set of challenges they face?

2.4.2 Coping

Research shows that parents of gifted children feel ill-prepared to deal with raising an atypical child, and would benefit from support services (Alsop, 1997; Free, 2017; Morawska & Sanders, 2008; 2009; Silverman & Golon, 2008). Parents themselves have indicated concerns about coping with the physical, mental, and emotional challenges of parenting a gifted child, coping with negative opinions, and with school systems that do not acknowledge or support giftedness (Morawska & Sanders, 2009). The ways parents cope with the negative impacts of raising a gifted child has largely not been examined in the literature. Although studies such as Alsop (1997) have recommended the need for counselling for parents of gifted children, the ways in which parents of gifted children cope, the types of supports they utilise, and the impact of those supports on the parents has been paid little attention.

Only one study from the literature explored within this review considered the resources parents of gifted children report utilising to cope with parenting challenges and stressors. Renati and colleagues (2017) investigated the coping resources of parents of gifted children finding that parents cited their own parents as a primary source of support (47.8%), while also noting specialised community centres and associations for the gifted as fundamental sources of support (43.4%). Additionally, approximately one fifth of parents noted personal qualities such as availability, patience, providing nurturance and persistence as resources they employed to cope with the challenges of raising a gifted child (Renati, et al., 2017).

It is important to note, however, that the exploration of coping resources in Renati's and colleagues (2017) study was through a questionnaire. Renati and colleagues (2017) noted that most of the parents in their study had difficulty completing the resources section of the questionnaire, with many parents leaving those sections blank. The authors suggest that the exploration of coping resources may be better investigated through qualitative methods such as semi-structured interviews. This study will respond to this recommendation by employing a semi-structured interview to understand the strategies that parents use to cope with the challenges associated with parenting a gifted child.

Silverman (2013) suggested that a way to prevent or ameliorate the social isolation that parents of gifted children may experience is through support groups. Support groups for gifted parents enable parents to share solutions to common problems (Webb et al, 2007). Indeed, Free's (2017) study provides support for the idea that social support for gifted parents is necessary due to the perceived lack of social support indicated by the parents in her study and the risk of social isolation. The Australian parents in Free's (2017) study considered an informal support group as the best type of support to meet their needs. As such, a support group was set up and its continuation long after the study had ended attests to the need for and benefit of these types of resources for parents of gifted children (Free, 2017).

Theoretical and empirical perspectives highlight the critical need for individuals to have access to others like themselves to form the social networks needed for psychological well-being (Neihart & Yeo, 2018). The idea that parents of gifted children require access to other parents who are similar to themselves is the basis of the establishment of support groups for parents of gifted children. The understanding that the experience of parents of gifted children is such that they may need support due to the unique challenges they face, has resulted in manualised programs such as Gifted and Talented Triple P Parenting (Morawska & Sanders, 2009), and SENG parent groups (Webb et al., 2007). While these programs assist in bringing parents of gifted children together, the content of both is aimed at helping parents manage the needs of their children. They do not focus on the needs of the parents themselves or their own well-being. No research to date has explored the use or availability of informal or formal support groups for parents of gifted children in New Zealand. Gifted and Talented Triple P parenting is not currently available in New Zealand and the availability of informal support groups such as SENG cannot be ascertained. A gap in the empirical literature exists regarding understandings of the coping patterns and behaviours of parents of gifted children, both internationally and within a New Zealand context.

Although the support group in Free's (2017) study was facilitated via in-person meetings, anecdotal evidence suggests that the rise of internet-based support groups such as closed Facebook groups for parents of gifted children have become a rich source of support connecting parents of gifted children from all over the world (Silverman, 2013; Merrill, 2012). Social media closed groups provide a platform for parents to share understandings, give advice, and celebrate their children without judgement (Silverman, 2013). Wong and Morton (2017) point out that the rise of thousands of these types of social media groups and the active participation within them provide some evidence of their importance and significance in the lives of parents of gifted children. Although Wong and Morton (2017) provide information on the presence of social media support groups, to date no research has been conducted on the use of social media as a resource or support for gifted parents. This study seeks to address this gap in the literature by asking parents directly to speak about their experiences coping with the challenges of parenting intellectually gifted children.

2.4.3 Positives

From the literature explored in this review, very few empirical studies have sought to examine the positive aspects of raising a gifted child. When adaptive processes and positive effects associated with parenting a gifted child have been mentioned in the literature, it has been due to incidental findings through research aimed at other objectives such as the challenges parents face, or parents' perceptions of the 'gifted' label. It has been the inclination of researchers to focus on the negative side of experiences, in turn, positive experiences may have been taken for granted or overlooked, despite being fundamental to parent's well-being.

Anecdotal evidence from experienced clinician's through their discussions with parents of gifted children sheds some light on positive experiences of raising gifted children. Silverman and Kearney (1989) asserted that due to intellectual giftedness running in families, households were generally full of highly intense, sensitive and perfectionistic individuals. They observed the families of exceptionally gifted children noting many were exciting and alive households and that mothers of intellectually gifted children tended to be highly verbal and energetic.

Silverman and Kearney (1989) report meeting many mothers through the 6000 intellectually gifted children they collected research on through at the Gifted Development Centre, who felt a deep sense of fulfilment in their role as parents. These parents, who were often gifted themselves, had made the choice to become gifted nurturers. Silverman and Kearney, noting that the choice to parent is not one that is highly valued by society, recommend that more research is needed to understand the impact of gifted children on the mother and their life plans. Many of these mothers' had sacrificed brilliant careers to full-time parent and focus on the development of their children. While the impact of these decisions is not well understood, Silverman and Kearney allude to the experience as being positive and fulfilling for some mothers.

Some positives have been noted in the literature, however, it has often been a single sentence or something considered as a small aside. For example, Cornell (1983) noted that

some parents associated the gifted label positively with pride and closeness with their gifted child. Furthermore, some of the parents in Matthews, Ritchotte and Jolly's (2014) study concerning the parental use of the gifted label, felt empowered by the gifted label. They viewed their child's giftedness as a positive quality and relished opportunities to educate others about what it means to be gifted, to dispel myths about giftedness, and to advocate for the needs of the gifted. Although only approximately twenty-percent of the parents in this study reported ever engaging in these types of activities, each parent reported engaging in these types of conversations with multiple other parents.

A gap exists within the literature on the parents of gifted children regarding the positives they experience and the impact of these positive experiences on their wellbeing. Although Sayer (1994) stated that "parenting a gifted child can be filled with ecstasy and agony and everything in between" (p.7) empirical research has not explicitly explored the positive aspects of raising gifted children and parents have not been given a voice to share their perceptions of these joys. To fully understand the complete experience of parenting intellectually gifted children it is of utmost importance to consider the joys and the impact they can have on the experiences and perceptions of these parents.

Positive psychology draws attention to the need to explore the positive side of experiences. According to Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi (2000,) researchers should be more mindful of the valued experiences of "well-being, contentment, and satisfaction (in the past); hope and optimism (for the future) and flow and happiness (in the present)" (p 5). The positive impact of raising children whose development could be characterised as atypical has been explored in the extant literature on parenting children with disabilities (Blacher & Baker, 2007; McConnell et al., 2015; Phelps et al., 2009; Weiss, MacMullin, & Lunskey, 2015). Findings have indicated these parents experience positive gains, personal growth and benefits as well as challenges through their experiences raising their children (Blacher & Baker, 2007; McConnell et al., 2015; Phelps et al., 2009; Weiss, MacMullin, & Lunskey, 2015). Considering Rimlinger's (2016) findings that parents of gifted children experience elevated levels of stress and anxiety comparable to other atypical populations, it is important to also

consider the positive impact raising gifted children has on parents. This is a significant gap in the current literature on the experience of parents of intellectually gifted children.

This section of the chapter has provided a review of the literature pertaining to the impact raising gifted children has on parents. The limited literature available highlights many challenges that impact on parents of gifted children. These challenges are complex and originate from multiple levels of the parents ecosystem including, the gifted child, the family, the school environment, and societal attitudes. Furthermore, very few studies have sought to examine the well-being of parents of gifted children. Findings from these studies show elevated levels of parentings stress and anxiety, and highlight the importance of further research on parenting factors that impact negatively on the well-being of this population. In light of these recent findings, it is important to consider the ways parents of gifted children cope, and their perception of the services and supports available to them. Research has provided little knowledge of the coping behaviours of parents of intellectually gifted children.

Overall, it is evident that research on parenting gifted children has a heavy focus on the nature and extend of the challenges parents face with little regard to the joyful or positive experiences and the impact they have on parents who raise intellectually gifted children. This study seeks to address these gaps and provide a unique contribution to research in this area, by asking parents of their joyful and challenging parental experiences and how both impact their well-being. Furthermore, international research shows that societal attitudes and parents' experiences with the education system are two significant factors that impact negatively on parents of gifted children. Research from international sources cannot provide an accurate picture of the impact raising a gifted child has on a parent in New Zealand. Therefore, as this study is conducted within the New Zealand context, the following section will consider giftedness within the New Zealand sociocultural and educational systems.

2.5 Giftedness: New Zealand Context

The conceptualisation and construction of giftedness in New Zealand must be understood in a historical context in order to gain an understanding of the experiences of New Zealand parents of gifted children today. Research has indicated that the educational

setting and the understanding and provision for giftedness differs between cultures and government priorities over time (Cathcart, 2018). While it is acknowledged that in New Zealand the field of gifted education has been influenced by Western research and practice, New Zealand's socio-cultural and political milieu has shaped a unique understanding of giftedness and its place in New Zealand society and education (Moltzen, Jolly & Jarvis, 2018).

An understanding of the nature of gifted education and the concept of 'gifted' in New Zealand provides a lens through which to examine the experiences of the parents of intellectually gifted children in this study. This section will explore the literature relating to societal attitudes and values relating to giftedness in New Zealand. The history of the New Zealand education system's consideration of intellectual giftedness will be presented, and finally, recent research regarding teacher attitudes towards giftedness will be explored.

2.5.1 Egalitarian Society & Tall Poppy Syndrome

Sternberg (2018) contended that while the term 'intelligence' can be considered by its dictionary definition, individuals in society hold their own implicit ideas about what intelligence is. Today, intellectual giftedness is often considered to be a social construction (Borland, 2005; Borland, 2009). Wong and Morton (2017) pointed out that what giftedness is considered in one culture or community is informed by what that community sees as its values and priorities at that time. According to Solow (2001), not only is the meaning of giftedness dynamic across cultures and time periods, but it is also dynamic within a given culture and time period.

According to Delaune and Tapper (2015), New Zealand has a history of dismissal and rejection of the construct of giftedness. Knudson (2006) pointed to New Zealand societies fierce upholding of the ideal of an egalitarian society, whereby no one individual has an advantage over another, as a critical factor in the dismissal of intellectual giftedness today. Egalitarianism and its impact on the availability of educational provisions for gifted children and young people has been written about with reference to its influence in both New Zealand and Australian contexts (Gross, 1999; Knudson, 2006; Kronborg, 2018, Larsson, 1986; Plunkett & Kronborg, 2007; Moltzen, Jolly & Jarvis, 2018). Moltzen (2003) writes "at a societal

level New Zealand prides itself on egalitarian values and standing tall in such an environment can at times elicit very negative responses (p.4).”

Egalitarianism within New Zealand society has been attributed to the nation's uneasiness with the idea that people may be born unequal in some way (Moltzen, 2003). Gross (1999) contends that contributing to this unease of inequality is the pervasive myth that intellectual giftedness guarantees the gifted child success in life and education. Consequently, New Zealand has a history of valuing conformity over standing out academically, and those that do stand out have often been subject to negative attitudes (Moltzen, 2011).

The negative attitude towards excellence has been epitomised in a term that has become commonplace in both New Zealand and Australian societies; the tall poppy syndrome (Silverman, 2013). Moltzen (2011) claims that tall poppy syndrome, the chopping down of those that stand out, is prevalent in New Zealand society and this has affected identification and provisions for gifted children and their families. Under this cultural climate, Delaune & Tapper (2015) contend that gifted children in New Zealand may learn early on that academic brilliance is negatively stigmatised.

Research has found some discrepancy between the attitude societies hold toward exceptional academic ability, as compared to exceptional ability in music or sport (Geake & Gross, 2008; Gross, 1999; O'Connor, 2012; Tapper, 2014). It seems that the tall poppy syndrome may affect the intellectually gifted to a greater degree. In a British study, O'Connor (2012) analysed newspaper stories of gifted youth. She found that youth who displayed exceptional ability in music or sport were often valued and celebrated by society, while youth who displayed exceptional intellectual ability were subjected to negativity. The intellectually gifted youth in O'Connor's (2012) study were characterised as 'abnormal', and their parents were subjected to similar negative characterisations.

Although research within a New Zealand context is limited, when the attitudes of society toward the intellectually gifted have been explored, a similarly bleak picture is

painted. Tapper's (2014) doctoral thesis argued that anti-intellectualism was alive and well in New Zealand schools and communities. Her findings indicated that academically gifted high school students in New Zealand were often positioned as 'others' by their peers. Commonly referred to negatively as 'nerds', the students in Tapper's study reported feeling that in order to 'fit in' socially, they needed to blend in academically, or become proficient in a broad range of activities. In contrast, the identity of the 'all-rounder' was shown to be the preferred identity espoused by the students, teachers, and parents in Tapper's study. The tension felt by the students in the study between their intellectually gifted identity, which was often negatively stigmatised, versus the preferred identity is summarised by Tapper with the following:

You can be bright, but not too bright so that you stand out; you can be an academic achiever, but you should be sporty and social as well; you can be smart and study hard, but you also need to be ready to party when your friends demand it; if you are a bright boy you had better be a bit macho, too, if you want to avoid the 'dreaded nerd' label; you can be a smart girl, but you need to know how to be 'popular' too. (Tapper, 2014, p.299)

Parents are not immune to the effects of egalitarianism, anti-intellectualism and tall-poppy syndrome in New Zealand. The parents in Tapper's (2014) study report being uncomfortable with the term 'gifted' and tended not to discuss their child's academic exceptionalism with others for fear of being regarded as 'pushy parents'. Tapper (2014) contextualised the reluctance parents experienced in discussing their child's educational achievements, as being indicative of a broad 'anti-arrogance discourse' in New Zealand society (p. 300). Parents felt any grandstanding about the academic achievements of their child would be met with disapproval (Tapper, 2014).

Tapper's findings are not surprising considering earlier New Zealand based literature. Research has found that New Zealand parents often understate and underestimate their child's abilities (Knudson, 2006; Riley et al., 2004). Furthermore, a study by the Education Review Office (2008) concluded that New Zealand parents were attuned to the negative perceptions of intellectually gifted children and were well versed in the negative 'tall poppy syndrome' and 'nerd' discourses. A recent study asserted that parents of gifted children in

New Zealand reported feeling embarrassed and did not wish for their child to be labelled as intellectually gifted because they did not want their child exposed to negative judgements (Wong & Morton, 2017). Wong and Morton (2017) argue that the negative judgements these parents speak of are due to societal constructions of intellectual giftedness as 'abnormal child development'.

Parents of intellectually gifted children have been characterised in the media as pushy and demanding since the turn of the twentieth century. The dismissing of giftedness as an innate ability and perils of the pushy parent was highlighted in an article in the Nelson Mail ("Over-Taught Children", 1908). The article referred to giftedness as the result of intense parental instruction and went on to warn society that children whose mothers pushed them to perform at exceptional or unnatural levels would become unhappy and disturbed and that their abilities would likely diminish as they got older.

While some international studies (Freeman, 2013; Margolin, 1994) have painted a picture of the 'pushy' parent of the gifted child as one who 'hot houses' their child into greatness at the expense of the child's wellbeing, studies with New Zealand populations (Bicknell, 2014; Margrain, 2007; Tapper, 2014) have found the opposite to be true. Tapper (2014) explains that this contradiction in findings is partly due to the cultural milieu operating in New Zealand. Tapper's (2014) findings show that parents of intellectually gifted children in New Zealand perceived their child's well-being as the most important consideration, placing their child's happiness and formation of friendships as more important than their academic achievement. Likewise, Margrain's (2007) study of young gifted readers in New Zealand found none of the parent participants agreed with the idea of 'hothousing', and all avoided 'pushing' their child.

It seems from the literature presented that the way gifted children and their parents are treated is often influenced by others' understandings of what giftedness is. While there is some research to support the assertion that intellectual giftedness is often negatively constructed in New Zealand, what this review of literature highlights is the need for more research on the effect these attitudes have on the wellbeing of parents of gifted children.

There is acknowledgement within the research that parents of gifted children are aware of the negative discourses that surround the gifted label in New Zealand (Tapper, 2014; Wong & Morton, 2017). This often led parents to underestimate their child's abilities or avoid publicly labelling their children as gifted. However, no literature has explored the effect egalitarianism, tall poppy syndrome and the anti-intellectual discourses found within New Zealand society (Tapper, 2014; Wong & Morton, 2017) have on the well-being of parents raising intellectually gifted children. The importance of conducting this study at this time will be further highlighted within the next section through the consideration of the New Zealand educational context.

2.6 Giftedness within New Zealand Education

Moltzen (2011) contends that although the New Zealand education system has often attracted international recognition for its innovative and progressive practices, its record regarding provision for its gifted students has not been afforded the same praise. New Zealand's efforts to support gifted children through the education system have been described as "patchy, inconsistent, uneven and weak" (Moltzen, 2011, p.1). In recent times, gifted education in New Zealand has been privy to tremendous gains and significant losses due to changes in political priorities (Riley & Bicknell, 2013). What follows is an introduction to the recent history of gifted education in New Zealand, and a discussion regarding recent research on the state of gifted education today and the perspective of teachers.

The study of gifted education in New Zealand is relatively young, with its roots traced back to the 1970s (Kronborg, 2018). Until the late 1990s, there was little provision for and recognition of the diverse needs of gifted students within the New Zealand education system. In the 1990s a shift in attitudes, due in part to the shift nationally toward recognition and acceptance of diversity through the 'rights' movements for various marginalised groups, had the effect of igniting a focus on this underserved population (Moltzen, Jolly & Jarvis, 2018). In what was heralded as a new era for gifted education, the Ministry of Education formed under the newly appointed Labour-led government established an Advisory Group on Gifted Education in 1997 (Moltzen, 2003). The Advisory Group recommended the development of a national gifted education policy as the most urgent matter at that time

(Working Party on Gifted Education, 2001). While the Ministry of Education rejected that recommendation and still has not developed a nationally recognised policy today, it did accept and implement other priorities put forward by the Advisory Group (Working Party on Gifted Education, 2001).

Consequently, over the next decade, some important initiatives were implemented designed to improve the identification and education of gifted students in New Zealand. In 2005 a significant change was made to the National Administration Guidelines (NAG 1(c) iii) to include gifted and talented learners as a priority, in doing so all schools were required to identify and provide for the needs of gifted students. Furthermore, Ministry funded comprehensive research was undertaken (Working Party on Gifted Education 2001; Ministry of Education, 2004; Education Review Office, 2008) and resources were created and distributed to schools containing information, research, and best practice recommendations (Ministry of Education, 2008; 2012). Additionally, funding was allocated for talent development initiatives and professional development (Riley & Bicknell, 2013). For the first time in the history of gifted education in New Zealand, a light was shined on the needs of gifted students.

While positive progress was made in gifted education during the first years of the twenty-first century, a new government in 2008 resulted in a change of focus (Riley & Bicknell, 2013). The lens that had been focused on gifted education moved away, and subsequent losses across gifted education were felt with cuts made to funding, research, professional development, the dissolution of the gifted advisory board, and the loss of Ministerial responsibility for gifted education within the cabinet (Riley & Bicknell, 2013). No educational initiatives rolled out by the new National-led government over their nine-years in parliament explicitly addressed the needs of gifted students (Riley & Bicknell, 2013).

Although gifted education has not been a government priority since 2008, research has shown that growth in the awareness for schools to provide for gifted students has been maintained to some degree (Riley & Bicknell, 2013). Riley and Bicknell (2013) identified the addition of gifted and talented to the NAG (2005) as the most effective initiative for

progressing giftedness in New Zealand. However, prominent researchers in gifted education in New Zealand (Moltzen, 2011; Riley & Bicknell, 2013) have cautioned that without a government presence, the progress made in gifted education in the early 2000s is at risk of being lost or standing still.

The period from the early 2000s to the present day can best be described as inconsistent in its attention and progress toward good practice in the identification and provision of gifted students. While parent voice is very limited regarding their experiences throughout this time period, some research was done with schools, teachers and students to ascertain the effectiveness of the new government initiatives. What follows is a discussion of the findings of the major studies conducted since early 2000.

2.6.1 Current State of Gifted Education

The Ministry of Education conducted landmark research (Riley, Bevan-Brown, Bicknell, Carroll-Lind, & Kearney, 2004) that investigated identification and provisions for gifted students in New Zealand schools. Findings indicated that while there was growth in awareness of the need to provide for and identify gifted students, professional development, access to resources and support, funding and time were current barriers and resulted in a limited range of provisions. Recommendations and areas of priority were outlined and included professional development for all teachers, and an emphasis on increasing the involvement of parents of gifted students in policy development, identification and provisions.

A review of gifted education in 317 schools was undertaken by the Education Review Office (2008), three years after the implementation of the NAG in 2005, which required all schools to identify and provide for the needs of gifted children. The Education Review Office (2008) found that 17 percent of schools had good provisions across all areas evaluated while 48 percent of schools had good provisions in some areas but not others. Gifted children reported feeling bored and frustrated at the lack of challenge in their curriculum with half noting they did not enjoy school and felt programs did not meet their needs. Bullying and tall-poppy syndrome resulted in students not wanting their intellectual gifts celebrated

publicly at school. Furthermore, most schools did not communicate with parents of gifted students about issues pertaining to the child's giftedness.

Riley and Bicknell (2013) replicated the Ministry funded (2004) study outlined above to ascertain what difference the initiatives put in place in the first decade of the twenty-first century had made to gifted education in New Zealand. The research, which was not funded by the Ministry, indicated positive changes across all aspects of gifted education since the change to the NAG in 2005. Notable changes included the number of schools reporting specific gifted policies, noted as 59.4% compared to 27.9% in 2004, growth in formal identification of students up from 60.3% in 2004 to 81.7% in 2013, and an improvement in parental involvement in the identification process. It was noted there was still confusion surrounding definitions, characteristics and identification practices, and gifted provisions. Conclusions from Riley and Bicknell's (2013) report point to the shortage of time, money and professionals with specialist training as impacting upon the appropriate identification and provision of gifted students in New Zealand schools.

This research is being conducted at a pivotal time in the history of giftedness within New Zealand. A change in government in 2017 has seen a renewed focus on giftedness. Consequently, the Ministry of Education in 2019 launched the first in a range of initiatives designed as a package of support for gifted education, which included funding for one-day-schools, awards for gifted learners, out of school experiences and events, and additional support for teachers. With more initiatives due to be rolled out, the new government is highlighting the need to provide more and better learning support for gifted students, which they estimated is up to 40,000 students (Ministry of Education, 2019).

Research over the last decade has considered the attitudes of teachers in New Zealand toward gifted children and their families. The attitudes teachers hold toward giftedness can impact upon the gifted child and their whānau (Delaune, 2018; Neumeister et al., 2007). Riley and Bicknell (2013) argue that although there has been progress made toward better identification and provisions for gifted children in New Zealand schools based on surveys, qualitative answers illuminate attitudes that may be problematic and more

difficult to shift than changes in policy and procedural documents. Some teachers in New Zealand report feeling that time and attention would be better spent on children at the bottom than on gifted students, while some teachers did not recommend any students for special programs (Riley & Bicknell, 2013). Other research has found New Zealand teachers avoid using the term gifted (Delaune, 2018; Newton, 2009). The primary school teachers in Newton's (2009) study argued that parents of children who were labelled as gifted placed unhealthy pressure upon their child to achieve highly at school. Furthermore, research in New Zealand has demonstrated that some teachers still question the existence of giftedness or suggest that all parents believe their child is gifted (Delaune, 2018; Keen, 2005; Margrain & Farquhar, 2011).

Not all research has shown that educators within New Zealand reject or lack understanding of giftedness. Teachers in Needham's (2012) study agreed that gifted education practices should be equitable with those afforded to children with other special needs. This argument is echoed by principals in Bush's (2011) study who contended that there was a great disparity in the level of support and funding provided for other special needs groups within the New Zealand education system when compared to the funding and support provided for schools to support gifted children and their special needs. Research has also found that teachers in New Zealand feel they require more professional development to understand giftedness and gain skills to best cater for gifted children (Keen, 2005; Education Review Office, 2008; Riley et al., 2004, Riley & Bicknell, 2013). Teachers are aware that they need to modify their teaching practice to provide an appropriate educational experience for academically gifted children but see barriers in funding, time, and people (Riley & Bicknell, 2013). Bevan-Brown (2012) suggests that professional development for educators should be aimed at addressing myths pervasive in New Zealand society that are noted as detrimental to gifted education, such as belief that all children are gifted (Needham, 2012), and the idea that the gifted children will achieve highly without a differentiated educational program (Cathcart, 2005).

The research presented in this section has shown New Zealand socio-cultural milieu to espouse values and ideals such as egalitarianism, tall-poppy syndrome and anti-

intellectualism. Parental voice is missing from the New Zealand literature, therefore, the effect of context and culture on parenting and parental well-being is not well understood. With some teachers in New Zealand still questioning the existence of giftedness or declaring all children are gifted (Margrain & Farquhar, 2011), parents of gifted children in New Zealand may be faced with having to advocate for their child in a setting that does not understand their unique needs. The discourse of the pushy parent (Tapper, 2014; Wong & Morton, 2017) and the avoidance of the labelling of children as gifted (Margrain & Farquhar, 2011) by some within the education system in New Zealand could impact negatively on the parental experience and parental well-being.

2.7 Theoretical Frameworks

2.7.1 Bioecological Model

The extant literature on parenting gifted children highlights four areas that may impact the parents of gifted children: the child, the family, the school environment, and societal attitudes. Bronfenbrenner's Bioecological Model of human development (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006) fits well with the four areas highlighted above, providing this study with a conceptual framework through which to view the experiences of parents of intellectually gifted children. The Bioecological Model also fits well with the holistic definition of giftedness proposed by The Columbus Group (1991, as cited in Tolan & Piechowski, 2012) and the developmental perspective highlighted in Francoys Gagne's Differentiated Model of Giftedness and Talent (Gagne, 2008).

Urie Bronfenbrenner's Bioecological Model is highly regarded for its seamless integration of person and context (Lerner, Lewin-Bizan & Warren, 2011), and its emphasis on the importance of bidirectional interactions (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006). Bronfenbrenner's Bioecological Model consists of four dimensions: process, person, context and time (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006) and will be used as a basis for understanding the dynamics of the various biological, psychological, behavioural and ecological systems that are impacting parent's experiences of giftedness.

Process is described by Bronfenbrenner and Morris (2006) as bidirectional interactions with people, objects and symbols that occur regularly and become more complex over time. One type of process, called proximal processes are powerful mechanisms of development. These proximal processes are considered the driving force of development and are characterised as reciprocal interactions between the developing individual and other people, symbols or objects. For these interactions to shape development, they must occur regularly and increase in complexity over time. Proximal processes are considered by Bronfenbrenner and Morris to be the core dimension of the model.

The second dimension, person incorporates the individual's biological, psychological, and behavioural characteristics. The person dimension in Bronfenbrenner's Bioecological Model focuses on the developing individual's dispositions, resources, and demand characteristics (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006). It is these characteristics of the individual that Bronfenbrenner and Morris consider most influential to development, as they can shape the power and direction of proximal processes in positive or negative ways. The authors argue that the characteristics of the child may encourage or discourage reactions from the environment that can generate or disrupt development. In the case of parenting a gifted child, the gifted child's characteristics such as asynchronous development, behavioural intensity, and high intelligence could affect the parenting process, just as the parent's level of understanding and acceptance of their child's giftedness could affect the child.

The third dimension, context, includes the nested set of ecological systems defined in Bronfenbrenner's ecological model as the microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem, and chronosystem (see Figure 2). Context in Bronfenbrenner's Bioecological Model incorporates those levels of the environment that lie outside the developing individual but interact with and/or influence the individual both proximally and distally (Bronfenbrenner & Miller, 2006). The microsystem includes any immediate environmental setting or individual the developing person (e.g. the parent of a gifted child) has direct interactions with (Cicchetti, Toth & Maughan, 2000). It is agreed that factors and interactions within these more proximal ecologies exert the most potent influence on the developmental outcomes of individuals (Cicchetti, Toth & Maughan, 2000; Bronfenbrenner & Miller, 2006). It is at this

level that proximal processes do their work to drive development forward through regular, more complex interactions over time (Bronfenbrenner & Miller, 2006). Each individual's unique set of microsystems grows through an individual's life course as that person develops and engages in varied experiences (Cicchetti, Toth & Maughan, 2000). For this study, the individual at the centre of the ecological system is the parent of the gifted child. Consequently, this study will consider key individuals and interaction within the parent's complex microsystem. Gifted children, and the parent's immediate family are potent forces when considering the impact of the gifted child on the parent's well-being and the availability and effectiveness of supports the parent has in order to cope with challenges.

The mesosystem, the next layer in Bronfenbrenner's ecology model, is characterised by the interaction of two or more microsystems (Lerner, Lewin-Bizan & Warren, 2011). The developing individual is a part of all microsystems, therefore when these microsystems combine mesosystem interactions occur that can function to disrupt or facilitate the development of an individual (Bronfenbrenner & Miller, 2006). An important mesosystem for gifted families is the relationship between parents and educators

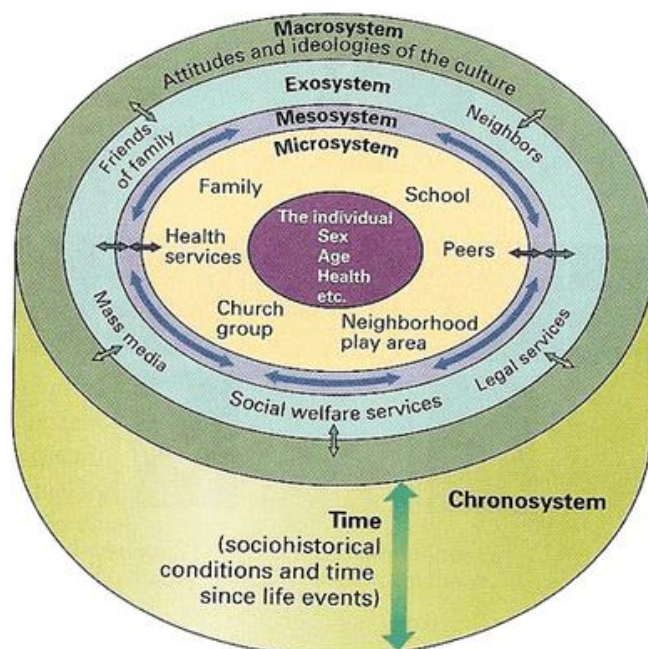


Figure 2 Bronfenbrenner's bioecological model of human development (Santrock, 2007)

The next layer of the ecological model, the exosystem, includes those environmental systems that, although they do not contain the developing individual can indirectly impact the individual through microsystem interactions (Cicchetti, Toth & Maughan, 2000). Social structures in the immediate environment of parents such as community organisations and services, and school Boards of Trustees are examples of exosystems (Cicchetti, Toth & Maughan, 2000). In the case of the parent of a gifted child, another important exosystem is the gifted child's educational environment, social interactions at school, and ability to make friends and engage social support.

The macrosystem includes the culture in which one lives, the values and beliefs of society, and the laws and political systems (Cicchetti, Toth & Maughan, 2000). Although the macrosystem is the most distal system from the developing person, it still exerts influence on the individual through interactions with the inner layers (Cicchetti, Toth & Maughan, 2000). This layer of the ecosystem is particularly salient for parents of gifted children as cultural beliefs regarding giftedness could impact the treatment of their children and themselves, in some cases leading to social isolation and stigma. Furthermore, government educational policies and funding levels for gifted children in schools could also affect opportunities presented to gifted children and the support services available to parents.

The last dimension of time (the chronosystem) cuts across all levels of the ecosystems as a means of evaluating development across the lifespan. Time, as presented in Bronfenbrenner's Bioecological Model is important for the measurement of change, consistency and predictability across all dimensions of the bioecological system (Bronfenbrenner & Miller, 2006). Time is also important, as it is one of the defining features of proximal processes, and if proximal processes do not occur on a regular basis, interactions lose their effectiveness (Bronfenbrenner & Miller, 2006). Lastly, time also relates to the historical time-period the developing person was born into and the impact of the timing of certain life course events (Bronfenbrenner & Miller, 2006). With regard to the concept of time, it is important for this study to consider current conceptualisations of what constitutes an intellectually gifted child and the meaning of the construct within New Zealand culture today. The understandings and values currently held by New Zealand society could positively

or negatively influence the parenting experience. Time is also an important consideration in this study as it facilitates our thinking about the regularity of positive or negative parenting experiences and their influence on parental well-being. For example, regular challenging experiences with their gifted child, the school, family or community could present a risk to the parent's well-being.

Recent research (Chellapan & Margrain, 2013; Free, 2017; Rimlinger, 2016) has highlighted the effect negative societal attitudes has on the parents of gifted children. Rimlinger (2016) hypothesised that the increased stress levels found in parents of gifted children in her study, were not stemming from the characteristics of the child and difficulties with interactions occurring at the microlevel, but instead were due to lack of wider social support and understanding regarding the challenges of raising gifted children. While this research was exploratory, attending to the trickle-down effect of a macrolevel influence, such as New Zealand cultural attitudes towards intellectual giftedness, will be an important consideration. Boss (2001) emphasised the need to take into account community and cultural contexts in which a parent is embedded to understand why and how challenges affect individuals, and to understand how parents respond to these challenges.

Bronfenbrenner's Bioecological Model is useful as a framework in this study as it emphasises the importance of all layers of the ecological system as impacting on and being impacted by the developing individual. In this study, the developing individual is the parent of an intellectually gifted child. In order to consider the nature and extent of the challenges parents of gifted children experience consideration must be paid to proximal and distal factors.

While Bronfenbrenner's Bioecological Model provides this study with a broad framework for considering the challenges that could affect parental well-being, an additional theoretical framework that considers factors such as coping and meaning or subjective appraisal in more detail will provide direction for a thorough investigation into the experiences of these parents. The Family Adjustment and Adaptation Response (FAAR) model (Patterson, 1988; Patterson, 2002) emerged from studies of families adapting to stressful life

experiences, including chronic illness, disability and children with atypical development. Although the model, as far as the researcher knows, has not been applied to the study of gifted families, the FAAR framework could be useful for understanding the effect of long-term demands, such as parenting a gifted child, has on the parent and how these parents cope.

2.7.2 The Family Adjustment and Adaptation Response Model

The FAAR model (Patterson, 1988; 2002) emerged as an extension of the double ABCX model which describes how an initial stressor and pile up of demands (aA), the family's adaptive responses (bB), appraisal of the stressor (cC), and coping strategies (BC) interact and influence adaption (XX) to crisis (McCubbin & Patterson, 1983). Crisis is defined as a subjective experience which exists along a continuum of distress, and can include low levels of distress through to crisis (Patterson, 2002). In the FAAR model (see Figure 3) four key constructs are emphasised: family demands, family capabilities, family meanings, and family adjustment or adaptation (Patterson, 2002). A key factor of the FAAR model is it's proposition that families utilise their capabilities (resources and coping behaviours) to balance their demands (stressors, strains, and daily hassles). For this study, the framework will be applied to the study of individual parents; therefore, the word family will be omitted in order to align the framework with the unit of study in this project.

Demands include (a) normative and non-normative stressors (discrete events of change); (b) ongoing strains (unresolved, insidious tensions); and daily hassles (minor disruptions of daily life) (Patterson, 2002). Capabilities comprise (a) tangible and psychosocial resources (what the individual has) and (b) coping behaviours (what the individual does). Demands and capabilities can occur from three different levels of the ecosystem: (a) individual family members, (b) the family unit and (c) various community contexts. When considering the parent of a gifted child, the identification of the child as gifted could be an individual level demand; conflict between family members on how best to manage the gifted child could be a family level demand, and negative attitudes in the community about the gifted child could be a community level demand. Parent education, support from family

members, and good schooling opportunities could be examples of capabilities across the levels of the ecosystem that parents may use to help cope with demands.

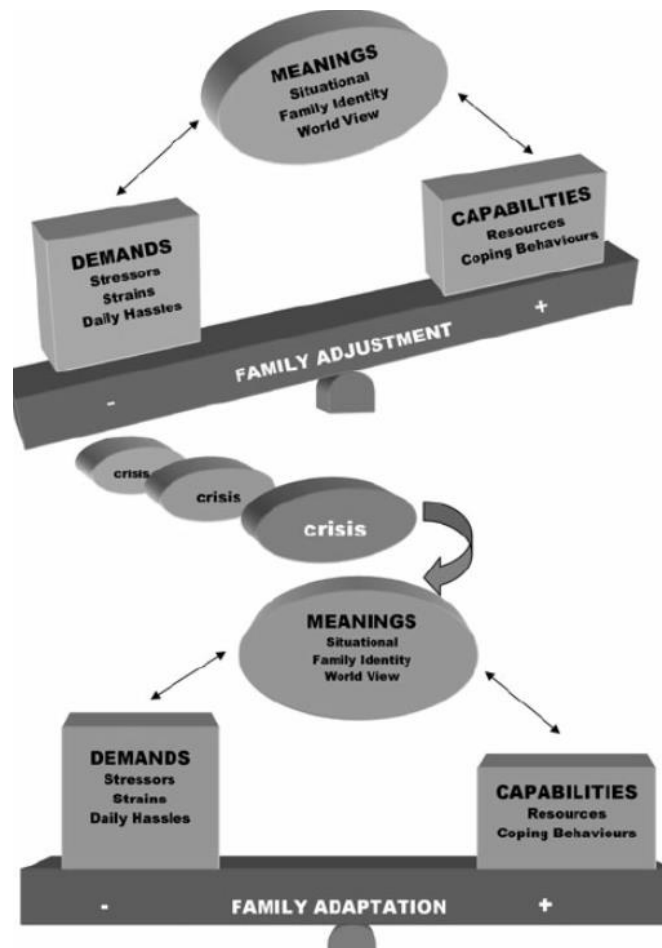


Figure 3 The Family Adjustment and Adaptation Response Model (Patterson, 2002).

Meaning is an important factor in the FAAR Model. Patterson (2002) describes three levels of meanings (these have been adapted to remove the family as the unit of study): (a) the definition of demands (primary appraisal), (b) their identity as a parent and (c) their worldview. According to Patterson (2002), meanings influence the nature and extent of risk, as well as the protective capacity of the parent. Meanings (or appraisals) of an event as stressful or challenging are essential to the experience of that event as distressing, thus,

stress and daily hassles may not be caused by the challenging experience itself, but by the interpretation of the experience as stressful by the parent (Patterson, 1988).

The meanings parents place on their experiences will be included in this study in order to understand the effect the experiences have on parental well-being and to further understand the ways parents cope with challenges. Free's (2017) findings, in which parents perceived giftedness as a 'disease', highlights the value of considering the meaning parents ascribe to their experiences. Conversely, positive meanings may come from challenging experiences, for example, the extra effort required advocating for an appropriate education for a gifted child may not be seen as a demand; instead, some parents may see this extra effort as integral to their identity as a parent of a gifted child. They may see this extra demand as a positive attribute, in that they are willing to do whatever it takes to facilitate their child's ability to succeed and thrive and do not view the experience as a hassle or stressor. Parents may vary greatly in their response to the challenges associated with raising a gifted child. According to Braun and Clarke (2006) the most appropriate way to explore the meanings individuals make of their experiences and the similarities and differences between these meanings are through qualitative methods.

The FAAR Model will guide this study in consideration of the positive coping patterns of parents of gifted children. According to the FAAR model, the meaning parents apply to their current experience can be used to help cope with the experiences of crisis (Patterson, 1988). Patterson (2002) maintains that a parent's capabilities tell us how that parent may react to demands, and meanings tell us about how they may cope with the stressors. For example, when faced with stressors, parents of children with chronic conditions often describe positive gains associated with their challenging experiences (Weiss, MacMullin & Lunskey, 2015). No study to date has explicitly considered the positive gains associated with parenting gifted children as a primary aim of the study. Hastings and Taunt (2002) suggest that positive gain may act as a mechanism by which people adapt to the challenges of raising atypical children, although this idea has not yet been considered with parents raising gifted children.

Previous research has tested the FAAR model in studies of parents of children with disabilities, chronic health conditions such as asthma, allergies or diabetes and autism spectrum disorder (Patterson, 2002). The model has been found to be helpful in explaining parental stress and coping overtime (Tak & McGubbin, 2002), and is particularly useful in guiding qualitative investigations into parenting experiences and the meanings parents ascribe to events. The FAAR model is also beneficial for considering positive coping resources and strategies that mediate or moderate challenges which could affect parental well-being.

2.8 Chapter Summary

This chapter provided a brief introduction to the tensions and debate surrounding the definition of intellectual giftedness, then a review of the literature on the impact of parenting gifted children was presented, followed by an overview of giftedness within the New Zealand sociocultural and educational contexts. Finally, a discussion on the theoretical models that underpin this study was provided. It is evident from the literature that conducting research on the impact of raising intellectually gifted children is timely within both national and international contexts. Nationally, the New Zealand government has recently taken steps towards recognising and catering for an estimated 40,000 to 80,000 gifted children in schools. This research will give a voice to the experiences and perceptions of parents who have been largely overlooked within research on giftedness in New Zealand. While internationally, a small selection of recent research has found that not only do parents of gifted children face additional demands and challenges raising their gifted children, their well-being is also negatively affected. With recent studies finding parents of intellectually gifted primary school age children to have elevated levels of anxiety and parenting stress it is important to explore the impact raising an intellectually gifted child has on New Zealand parents.

Only one study to date has considered the experiences of New Zealand parents of young gifted children, and this study did not explicitly explore the well-being of these parents. With New Zealand's cultural milieu espousing values such as egalitarianism, anti-intellectualism and tall poppy syndrome it is likely that parents of gifted children in New Zealand are negatively impacted by the stereotypes and discourse surrounding the *gifted*

label both in the community and educational settings. It is vital we understand the experiences of parents of gifted children in New Zealand to adequately provide them with the support and services they require for themselves and to effectively parent their gifted child.

Not only is it important gain an understanding of the challenging experiences these parents face, but research has shown that an appreciation of the complete experience of parenting can only be gathered when positives or joys are also understood. There is a gap in the literature on the joys parents of gifted children experience and the impact these have on parental well-being. Furthermore, exploration of the various ways parents cope with the challenges they face raising their gifted children is also identified as a gap in the literature.

This study will address the gaps that have been identified in the extant literature by asking the following research questions: 1) What is the nature and extent of the challenges and joys parents experience raising their intellectually gifted children?; 2) What impact does raising intellectually gifted children have on parental well-being?; and 3) What are the coping resources parents of intellectually gifted children employ? The methodology utilised and data analysis process employed in this study, is presented in the following chapter.

CHAPTER 3: Methodology

This chapter presents an overview of the research design and methodology of the study conducted for this thesis. It begins by presenting the research design followed by a description of the method, participants, measures and the procedure of the study.

3.1 Research Design

The aim of this study was to gain an in-depth understanding of the challenges and joys of raising intellectually gifted children and the impact these have on parental well-being, as well as the coping behaviours of parents. An individual's perception of challenges and joys, and well-being is subjective and contextual, therefore a qualitative methodology using semi-structured interviewing was deemed an appropriate approach for this study. It is the intention of this study to provide insight into the experiences of some parents, it is not the intention to imply that the experiences or views described by the parents in this study apply in all situations. The generalisability of the findings is therefore constrained by the size of the sample.

The advantage of qualitative research is its consideration of people and settings holistically (Taylor, Bogdan & Devault, 2015) and its concern with describing, interpreting and understanding the meaning of complex human experiences from the individual's perspective (Smith, 2015). Braun and Clarke (2013) contend that qualitative methodology achieves these aims as it "... captures the complexity, mess and contradiction that characterises the real world, yet allows us to make sense of patterns of meaning" (p.7). According to Patton (2015) the richness of the data collected through the wealth of detailed information gained from focusing on selected issues in-depth in qualitative studies is what facilitates a deep understanding of the issues under investigation. Qualitative inquiries can provide new insights and knowledge in poorly understood and complex areas, such as understanding subjective experiences (Crowe, Inder & Porter, 2015) and in the case of this study, understanding the complexity of the experiences of parents of intellectually gifted children, which is an area of investigation that has received little attention to date.

In the discipline of psychology, qualitative methodologies aim to produce knowledge about the nature of experience and/or action (Levitt et al., 2017). The intention with this study was to have the voices of the parents of intellectually gifted children heard and understood, which fits with the tendency in qualitative research toward the use of natural language in data, analysis, and findings (Levitt et al., 2017). The current study adopted qualitative content analysis (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005; Schreier, 2014) as the primary framework to guide the process of data analysis. The use of content analysis was deemed appropriate due to the dearth of research on parenting gifted children.

3.1.1 Qualitative Content Analysis.

Qualitative content analysis is described as a method for gaining knowledge and understanding of an experience (i.e. parenting intellectually gifted children), by subjectively interpreting textual data (i.e. semi-structured interviews), through the process of systematically coding and identifying patterns and common themes (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). Qualitative content analysis (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005, Schreier, 2014) is an approach that can be utilised when existing theory or research on the topic is limited, not well understood or fragmented.

Qualitative content analysis is characterised by its attention to the reduction of data, systematic process and flexibility, and its focus on providing a detailed description of the data (Schreier, 2014). Qualitative content analysis does not look to build theory but instead looks to describe the meaning of the data (Schreier, 2014) in a way that attempts to stay true to the text (Bengtsson, 2016). To achieve this, Hsieh and Shannon (2005) and Schreier (2014) describe content analysis processes which work to reduce the amount of data and extract themes that are directly relevant to the research questions, that are meaningful, and representative of the data provided by the participants (i.e. their experiences, thoughts and feelings about raising intellectually gifted children and their perspective of the related impact on their well-being). Keeping the research question in mind is essential, and Elo and Kyngas (2008) recommend only looking for units of analysis that have relevance to the research question to prevent becoming overwhelmed with the data. In qualitative content analysis, the process of analysis does not involve interpretation but rather a description of the

manifest statements made by the participants through coding and categorising (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005; Schreier, 2014). The result is a direct representation of what was said in answer to the interview and research questions (Crowe, Inder & Porter, 2015).

3.2 The Researcher

Bengtsson (2016) contends that the researcher must consider their experience of the phenomenon to be studied in order to minimise any bias of his/her own influence. While having pre-conceived knowledge of the subject under investigation and a familiarity with the context can be an advantage (Bengtsson, 2016), care must be taken that this knowledge does not affect the participants or the analysis and interpretation of results (Bengtsson, 2016; Levitt, 2017). The steps taken to minimise any potential bias are noted throughout the descriptions of the method and procedure carried out in this study. A common way for researchers to make explicit their experience with the phenomenon they are studying is through disclosure statements (Coleman, Guo & Dabbs, 2007; Levitt, 2017).

3.2.1 Disclosure Statement

My professional and personal experiences have provided me with the passion to conduct this study. I am a mother of intellectually gifted children and have also worked with and along-side families of gifted children within the school setting. These experiences have provided me with insight to understand and interpret the stories of other mothers of gifted children. The insights I bring to this project enable me to make a personal connection to this study. The insider perspective and group membership I held with the participants assisted in building rapport and facilitated the richness and depth of data from semi-structured interviews. The following quote from a participant of this study, (Judy, mother of three gifted children aged 12, 15 and 17), highlights the benefit of the interviewer holding insider status: "I love that I'm talking to somebody that's got gifted kids!" As noted by Judy's words, I was open with parents who asked if I was a mother of gifted children. These parents felt free to speak without reserve about subjects they may have otherwise had reservations to share with someone who did not understand their journey.

Although prior to beginning this study I had worked with families of gifted children and belonged to the Facebook groups where recruitment occurred, I had no previous connection with any of the participants in this study and had not met with them or conversed with them via the internet previously. Furthermore, to ensure my personal biases did not impact on the collection, analysis, and interpretation of the data, the interview questions were revised extensively with my supervisor. Additionally, a section of the data was coded and analysed by another researcher in order to ensure the key themes and categories were informed by the data, not my personal response to the data.

3.3 Methods

3.3.1 Ethical Approval and Considerations.

Ethical approval for the study was sought and received in 2018 in accordance with the ethics review processes of the University of Canterbury (see Appendix A). Informed consent was obtained by providing all parents with an information sheet detailing the study in full (see Appendix B) and a consent form was completed after the parents had time to review the information sheet and ask questions (see Appendix C).

Participation by those recruited for the study was on a voluntary basis and no remuneration was offered. Participants could withdraw their participation at any time throughout the course of the research and this was clearly outlined to the participants in writing and verbally. No participants exercised this option. Due to the personal nature of the interview, participants were made aware in writing that they were not obliged to answer any questions they did not wish to answer, and if they felt any distress during the interview, the interview would be stopped and only continued with verbal consent. No parents expressed distress during the interview or omitted to answer any question. Care and consideration of the participant's anonymity and confidentiality was taken through the following processes: interviews were conducted in a private quiet space, all text that could identify participants was removed from the data prior to analysis, and pseudonyms were used.

3.3.2 Recruitment

In qualitative research the goal is to select informants who can provide information that is relevant to the phenomenon being investigated (Coleman, Guo & Dabbs, 2007); therefore, the selection of participants is determined by the research question (Crow, Inder & Porter, 2015). In contrast to quantitative investigations, in qualitative studies the adequacy of the data depends on the quality and sufficiency of the information, not the number of participants (Levitt et al., 2017). The most commonly used method to achieve high quality information in qualitative content analysis studies is purposive sampling (Elo et al., 2014). Purposeful sampling is described by Patton (2015) as a powerful sampling technique whereby the researcher selects participants who can provide rich information about the issues of greatest importance to the study.

Purposeful sampling was the technique utilised in this study. In order to recruit parents of intellectually gifted children that would provide rich information, an advertisement (see Appendix D) was placed on Facebook pages of New Zealand gifted groups and organisations, including closed groups specifically for New Zealand parents of gifted children. The criterion for eligibility for this study was the presence in the family of at least one child between 6 and 16 years with a formal cognitive assessment that documented their intellectual gifted status. The advertisement contained the researchers email and asked interested parents to make contact.

3.3.3 Participants

The final group of participants recruited for this study were nine mothers of gifted children from throughout New Zealand (see Table 3.1 for demographic and assessment information). Although the study was open to participation from mothers and fathers of intellectually gifted children, only mothers of gifted children responded to advertisements. This is consistent with previous research on parenting gifted children (Free, 2017 & Rimlinger, 2016) which also had lower response rates to advertisements from fathers compared to mothers. The mothers resided in a variety of rural and urban regions throughout New Zealand. Most children had been formally identified as intellectually gifted by cognitive

assessment through a psychologist and some had been identified through the assessment process during enrolment into one-day-schools for gifted children. In New Zealand, cognitive assessment for giftedness is usually accessed via a private psychological service at the cost of the family.

Many of the mothers were raising more than one gifted child with ages of the children ranging from 3-years-old to 18 years-old ($M = 11.6$ years; $SD = 3.55$). Most of the gifted children (78%) were aged 12 years or over at the time of the interviews, thus highlighting the extensive lived experience these mothers brought to the study. All mothers were given pseudonyms to preserve confidentiality.

Table 3.1 provides participant information, including geographical location, age and gender of gifted children, and type of formal assessment of giftedness. Although not all children in some families had been assessed formally as gifted, all mothers referred to all of their children as intellectually gifted. The selection criteria for this study specified the presence of at least one child in the family having had a formal assessment of giftedness. Therefore, it was not necessary for the other children within the family to have had formal assessments conducted for them to be included in the study. As outlined in the table below, fourteen out of the nineteen children of the parents in this study had a formal assessment of giftedness.

Table 3-1 Participant pseudonyms and information

Mother	Children	Location	Assessment
Susan	Girl- 12yrs	Christchurch	One-day-school
Helen	Girl- 14yrs	Wellington	Psych assessment
	Boy- 12yrs		Psych assessment
Amy	Boy- 9yrs	Tauranga	Psych assessment
	Girl- 3yrs		
Mary	Girl- 9yrs	New Plymouth	Psych assessment
	Boy- 6yrs		
Jane	Girl- 14yrs	Christchurch	Psych assessment

	Girl- 12yrs		Psych assessment
Sarah	Boy- 14yrs	Greymouth	Psych assessment
	Girl- 12yrs		Psych assessment
Fiona	Boy- 18yrs	Nelson	Psych assessment
	Boy- 16yrs		Psych assessment
	Boy- 12yrs		Psych assessment
Bridget	Girl- 12yrs	Auckland	One-day-school
	Boy- 15yrs		
Judy	Boy- 12yrs	Palmerston North	Psych assessment
	Girl- 17yrs		
	Girl- 15yrs		

3.4 Measures

3.4.1 The Semi-Structured Interview.

Individual semi-structured interviews we used to collect data for this study. Semi-structured interviewing is a form of interviewing whereby the same general questions or topics are asked of each of the participants involved (Willig, 2013). Smith (2015) contends that a semi-structured interview facilitates a deep understanding of each participant's individual experiences and allows for flexibility in telling his or her story. An advantage of semi-structured interviewing is that it provides an opportunity for the researcher to hear the participant talk about an aspect of their life or experience (Willig, 2013). It was important that the voices of the mothers in this study, a group who are not often afforded a voice within the literature, were provided the opportunity to communicate their experiences and perspectives.

The interview questions were formulated to capture the experience of parenting gifted children. Extensive consultation occurred with the researcher's primary supervisor to refine the questions and ensure they were not biased by the researcher's own experiences as a mother of gifted children. Previous studies on parenting gifted children (Alsop, 1997; Free, 2017; Renati et al., 2017; Rimlinger, 2016) have only focused on the challenging aspects of

the experience of raising gifted children, therefore, it was important to provide parents in this study with the opportunity to share their challenging and joyful experiences. Great care was taken to ensure the questions in this study were open, non-leading and covered both positive and negative aspects of raising gifted children.

The semi-structured interview schedule (see Appendix E) was divided into 4 main sections relating to the research questions: 1) giftedness; 2) challenging and joyful experiences; 3) impact on well-being; 4) coping and resources. The interview schedule contained questions relating to the theoretical frameworks such as questions relating to participant's positive and negative experiences across proximal (e.g. experiences with family) and distal (e.g. experiences with community organisations) levels of the individual's ecosystem and questions that required participants to consider their subjective appraisal of their own coping resources and well-being.

Hsieh and Shannon (2005) contend that when data for qualitative content analysis are collected through interviews, questions and probes should be open-ended. All questions in the interview schedule were open-ended, encouraging the participants to be open and expansive with their responses and to talk at length with minimal verbal input from the interviewer (Smith et al., 2009). Questions were purposefully posed to the participants as neither positive nor negative. "Tell me about your experience" was utilised to encourage responses that were not pre-conceived by the researcher. Where participants only described either positive or negative experiences, prompts were included "e.g. tell me about any positive/ negative experiences" to ensure a balanced perspective between the challenges and joys of raising gifted children and the positive and negative impacts on parental well-being

The main interview questions are listed below. Mothers were reminded at the beginning of the interview that all questions were related to the impact of raising gifted children. The full interview schedule including prompts is provided in Appendix E.

Topic	Interview Questions
Giftedness	
Q1	Tell me how you define giftedness
Q2	Tell me about your journey discovering your child/ren were gifted. What was that like for you?
Challenges and Joys	
Q3	Tell me about your experiences raising you gifted children
Q4	Tell me about your experiences with teachers, principals, Gate coordinators
Q5	Tell me about your experiences with other professionals and community organisations
Q6	Tell me about your relationships with your immediate family, your friends and your extended family
Well-being	
Q7	Tell me about your own well-being and how it may have been impacted by raising a gifted child
Coping and Resources	
Q8	Tell me about any of the resources and supports you currently access or have accessed in the past for yourself
Q9	Tell me about your experience with these supports
Overall Experience	
Q10	Tell me about what you believe to be the most positive aspect of raising a gifted child
Q11	Tell me about what you believe to be the most challenging aspect of raising a gifted child
Q12	Tell me about the aspects of raising a gifted child that have had the greatest impact on you and your well-being

At the end of the interview, questions such as “What other questions should I have asked that I did not?” and “Is there anything else you would like to tell me?” were included to gather any missing information. Based on the suggestion of a participant, an additional question was added to the interview schedule from interview 3 onwards: “Tell me about what you would like to see change in New Zealand in regards to raising intellectually gifted children.” Including this question provided this study with further information on issues that may be specific to the New Zealand context.

3.5 Procedure

Parents who were interested in the study contacted the researcher via the email address supplied on the advertisements. All potential participants were emailed an information letter which contained a brief description of the study, the inclusion criteria and what participation in the study would involve (see Appendix B). If the parent met the inclusion criteria and wished to participate in the research, they contacted the researcher who emailed a consent form (see Appendix C). All consent forms were completed and returned to the researcher via email prior to the commencement of the interviews.

The semi-structured interviews were administered individually and lasted approximately 40–90 minutes each. Interviews were arranged at a time and via a method most suitable to each participant. Parents could select whether to be interviewed via phone, video conferencing, or in person. Due to the geographical location of participants, most interviews were conducted over the phone ($n = 6$). The remaining interviews were conducted face-to-face ($n = 2$) at a place and time chosen by the participant, or via video conferencing ($n = 1$). Each parent was interviewed once, and the researcher conducted all the interviews. With parent's consent, interviews were audio recorded, transcribed verbatim and de-identified. Hard copies of the interview transcript for each parent were printed and thoughts and feelings about the interview and initial understandings relating to the research questions were noted and kept with the hard copy.

3.5.1 Data Analysis

As described above, the interview transcripts were analysed by the researcher using a content analysis approach (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005; Schreier, 2014). The unit of analysis for the study was whole interviews. The first step of the content analysis process (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005) involved reading and re-reading each interview transcript until a complete appreciation and understanding of the experiences of the mothers was achieved. The process of immersion in the data through repeatedly reading each transcript allows for discovery of new insights, meaning, and provides the reader with an appreciation of context (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). During this process notes were made on the hard copies of the transcripts

highlighting emerging patterns, themes, and significant statements while keeping in mind the research questions. Furthermore, this process also involved actively engaging in self-reflection by noticing any reactions and biases I had and noting these on each transcript.

Once a comprehensive understanding of the complete data set had been achieved, coding began by reading the transcripts word by word and breaking it down into smaller meaning units by highlighting those words or sections that captured key themes, thoughts or concepts (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). Codes were then given definitions and a coding frame developed (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005; Schreier, 2014). Schreier (2014) describes a coding frame as a list of codes with definitions that resides separate from the data and consist of at least one main category and at least two subcategories. A coding frame is utilised to apply codes in a systematic and consistent way. The process of building a coding frame consists of four steps: 1) selecting material; 2) structuring and generating categories; 3) defining categories; 4) revising and expanding the frame (Schreier, 2014).

A coding frame is initially built using only part of the data (Schreier, 2014). Selection of suitable data or material for building the frame is an important initial step in the process and Schreier (2014) recommends selecting the data or material which will reflect the full diversity of data sources. For this study Judy's transcript was selected to begin building the coding frame. Structuring and generating categories from the data from the initial transcript was the next step employed in the data analysis process.

Schreier (2014) describes structuring as the process of creating the main categories, while generating is described as the process of creating subcategories within the main categories. The creation of categories can be data-driven (inductive), concept-driven (deductive), or a mixture of both. Schreier recommends not deriving categories purely in a concept-driven fashion contesting that this risks the researcher not providing a good description of the material. Instead concept-driven categories are often combined with data-driven categories, or categories are solely data-driven. In this study the initial main categories (i.e. *family implications*, *social implications*) were derived in a concept-driven way based on the researcher's prior knowledge stemming from theoretical frameworks (e.g. FAAR model),

the literature review, and interview questions. Subcategories (i.e. *maternal exhaustion, social isolation, and social support*) were generated in a data-driven way, emerging from close consideration of the data in order to discover new ideas, theories, phenomena and explanations.

The next step in the process of building the coding frame was to define the categories (Schreier, 2014). This involved naming the categories, providing a description of the meaning, an exemplar code and text from the data (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005; Schreier, 2014). This process of defining the categories was carried out for all the subcategories generated, while main categories were given a brief description only.

Revising and expanding of the coding frame is the final step in the process. Revising involves consideration of the entire coding frame and may result in combination of subcategories that are similar or reclassifying subcategories as main categories, while expanding occurs when the researcher works on coding a previously un-coded section of the data and involves exploring the data for any additional main categories and subcategories (Schreier, 2014). Upon exhaustion of the development of categories for the coding frame from within the initial transcript, the coding frame was then considered and revised with some categories being subsumed as they were too similar and a revised definition of the category could adequately convey the meaning of both categories. For example, under the main category of family implications a subcategory named '*reduced ability to enjoy 'normal' family experiences*' was subsumed under the subcategory '*child behaviour problems*' during the revising process, as it was noted that a '*reduction in 'normal' family experiences*' was an outcome of the '*child's behaviour problems*.'

The process of generating categories, defining categories and revising the coding frame was repeated numerous times with each interview until no new categories emerged from the data. The coding frame was then applied to each interview transcript through the process of consistently and systematically coding or assigning units of meaning to the categories of the coding frame. To ensure validity and reliability, a portion of the text was

coded independently by another experienced coder and intercoder agreement checks were conducted.

The use of the theoretical frameworks in the analysis of the data was an iterative process in this study. The Bioecological Model (Bronfenbrenner & Miller, 2006) and the FAAR model (Patterson, 1988) were utilised to help guide the initial conceptualisation of categories as described above. Then, after the coding frame was complete and relevant data from all transcripts had been applied to the coding frame a further level of analysis was employed to organise the data utilising the FAAR model (Patterson, 1989). As described in Chapter 2, in the FAAR model, individual outcomes are conceptualised as the result of a process whereby a family balances their demands (cumulative stressors and strains coming from individual, family and community sources) with their capabilities, which include resources (from individual, family and community sources) and coping behaviours. *Strains* are defined within the FAAR model (Patterson, 1988) as a tension associated with the need or desire to change something. Daily hassles are included as strains, while *stressors* are distinct from stressors which have a distinct start point.

Those aspects of a participant's life that have the potential to produce positive psychological outcomes in the event of stressors or strains are resources which is defined by Patterson (1988) as something an individual, family or community has, and coping behaviours which is defined as something an individual does. These definitions of strains, resources and coping behaviours guided the separation of sub-categories (factors) impacting the mother's experiences within each of the main categories (domains). For example, for each main category, subcategories that related to the challenging aspects of the experience of raising gifted children were organised together under the heading strains, while subcategories relating to the positive aspects of the experience of raising gifted children and/or the coping behaviours employed by mothers were organised together under the heading resources. The final hierarchy of categories explained above is outlined below in Figure 3.1 for each of the four overarching domains: 1) *Psychological Implications*, 2) *Family Implications*, 3) *Social Implications*, and 4) *Services*.

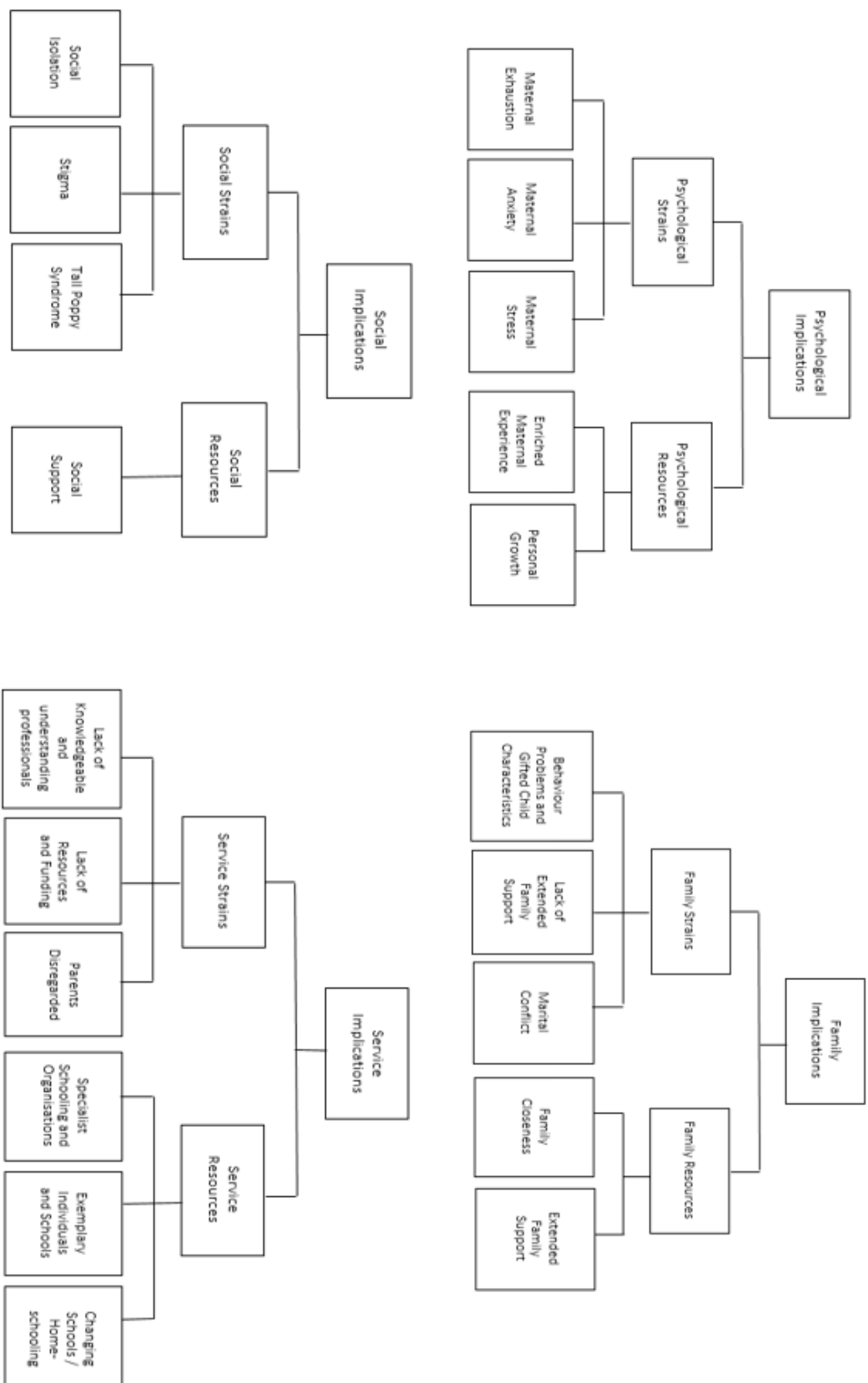


Figure 3: Hierarchical structure of categories after data analysis

3.6 Chapter Summary

This chapter presented the methodology of the study. A qualitative methodology using semi-structured interviews to collect data was deemed appropriate because the aim of this study is to gain an in-depth understanding of the experiences and perceptions of mothers of gifted children. Nine mothers of intellectually gifted children residing throughout Aotearoa New Zealand were recruited. Data was analysed using qualitative content analysis techniques and was guided by the theoretical frameworks for this study; the Bioecological Model and the FAAR model. Four overarching domains were uncovered: 1) *Psychological implications*, 2) *Family implications*, 3) *Social implications* and 4) *Services*. Each domain contained a number of categories of *strains* (challenges) and *resources* (joys and coping behaviours). The following chapter presents the results of the study.

CHAPTER 4: Results

This chapter presents the findings that address the research questions: 1) What is the nature and extent of the challenges and joys parents experience raising their intellectually gifted children? 2) What impact does raising intellectually gifted children have on parental well-being?; and 3) What are the coping resources parents of intellectually gifted children employ? Data analysis was carried out as outlined in the previous chapter, resulting in four overarching domains: 1) *Psychological Implications*, 2) *Family Implications*, 3) *Social Implications*, and 4) *Services*. Various *strains* and *resources* relating to each domain were found and are described in this chapter.

4.1 Domain 1: Psychological Implications

The first domain describes the emotional, cognitive and behavioural implications of raising intellectually gifted children. Mothers reported that their experience raising their gifted children resulted in a number of personal demands (strains) and capabilities (resources) and a brief description of each of these factors can be found in Table 4.1. Personal demands are clustered together under the heading 'strains' and are made up by three main factors: 1) maternal anxiety, 2) maternal exhaustion and 3) maternal stress. Personal capabilities are clustered together under the heading 'resources' and are made up of two main factors: 1) enriched maternal experience, and 2) personal growth.

Table 4-1 Psychological implications reported by mothers of intellectually gifted children

Factors	Description
Psychological Strains	
Maternal exhaustion	Mothers experienced exhaustion due to the impact of advocating for their children to access an appropriate education. Their children's gifted behaviours were another source of tiredness as were the tremendous sacrifice some mothers were making for the sake of their children's well-being.

Maternal anxiety	Mothers experienced worries about their children's social, emotional and cognitive well-being. Worries also centered on their children's future.
Maternal stress	Mothers reported elevated stress during the identification process. They also felt stress due to compounding maternal demands across multiple settings.
Psychological Resources	
Enriched maternal experience	Mothers described their parenting experience to have been enriched because of their gifted children. Close bonds were formed with children as gifted mothers shared a similar passion for learning. Mothers experienced amazement and pride in their children's achievements and possibilities for the future.
Personal growth	Through discovery of their children's giftedness, mothers became aware of their own giftedness and gained a greater understanding of intellectual giftedness. Mothers found pleasure in utilising their knowledge of giftedness to help other families in similar situations.

4.1.1 Psychological Strains

4.1.2 Maternal Exhaustion

When considering the impact raising gifted children had on their own well-being, most mothers spoke of the exhaustion they experienced. Exhaustion was derived from issues directly related to their gifted children's behaviours, from having to constantly advocate for an appropriate education for their children, and from the increased demands on their time, energy, and restricted ability to work outside of the home.

All mothers ($n = 9$) reported exhaustion when dealing with their children's behaviours related to giftedness. The following quote by Sarah sums up the complex and compounding psychological challenges she experienced raising her gifted children.

It's quite tiring, just because like my son is into everything so just like actually taking him places and getting him to things. And we are lucky because we can afford to pay for all the tuition so we don't have that stress but it's that physical showing up all the time and that's quite tiring and you have to look after yourself, your work, your family. I guess kind of that embarrassment when you have to go knocking on doors and emailing teachers and schools and that can be quite stressful and it's got to be constant. For instance when I went and saw the school, the follow up is not that great and it's not their fault they are under resourced but it's quite disappointing and then it's that always wondering again should I go and follow it up. And that's exhausting the emotional side of it. Yeah and wondering what do they think of me having to go in all the time. (Sarah, children aged 12 & 14)

Many mothers described exhaustion due to their gifted children's sleep problems, reporting that their children's intellectual giftedness resulted in need for less sleep, difficulty turning their brain off at night or waking in the middle of the night with complex questions. Jane describes the lack of sleep and late-night waking's due to her child's intellectual curiosity as impacting on her own well-being.

They don't sleep a lot, they still don't sleep a lot. But they really didn't sleep a lot when they were children and little kids. So, the overwhelming thing is being incredibly tired. My daughter would go to sleep but then she would wake up and come and ask me questions in the middle of the night, like infinity, like 2 o'clock in the morning conversations about infinity. And then she would wake up at 4 o'clock in the morning ready to start the day and it didn't matter what we did she wasn't tired, she had had enough sleep by 4 or 4.30 in the morning and was ready and was busy wanting to get on with everything. So, for me personally having gifted children is exhausting and you don't get much break. (Jane, children aged 12 & 14)

Many mothers ($n = 7$) spoke of the emotional and intellectual intensity of their gifted children and the impact of their children's intensity on their own well-being. Mary described her children's intensity as constant and resulting in exhaustion and little down-time for herself:

It's the intensity of them. There's no chill out time. There's no down time, it's just on or off basically. It's off when they are asleep and then game on when they're awake. Yeah that's exhausting. (Mary, children aged 6 & 9)

Judy also described feeling that raising gifted children was exhausting due to their intensities, which was further exasperated due to her raising three gifted children.

For me the process has been emotionally exhausting. And the intensity, just the intensity that's the biggest thing they do, every minute of the day is intense whether it's emotional or intellectual or physical, it's intense and exhausting. Especially when you multiple it by 3. It's intense. Sometimes I'd like to go to bed and read a book and turn my brain off. Inside my brain there is so much going on thinking of the challenges of each child (Judy, children aged 17, 15, 12).

Advocating for their gifted children was a common experience for all the mothers in this study. All mothers described fighting for their children's right to an appropriate education, often year after year across many teachers. The effort this took was reported as tiring and exhausting, as highlighted by Susan who detailed the need to advocate for her child over many years:

She was very unhappy there [at school]. Every year we would go in and talk to the teacher. And they would care for a little bit and then it would drop back off again and we would go back in and have the conversation again. And every year we would go in and this year is no different. So frustrating! (Susan, mother of 12-year-old)

Advocating for their own children greatly impacted all mother's parenting experiences and many perceived these experiences as having a negative impact on their own well-being. When asked what aspect of raising gifted children had the greatest impact on her own well-being, Bridget remarked "Probably constantly advocating. It's really tiring" (Bridget, children aged 12 & 15). Fiona also felt the impact of constantly advocating for her three children within the school system and described the impact this had on her ability to work out-side of the home:

It's an intense journey especially you're advocating ... and by that stage I was advocating for all three kids. You feel like you're fighting for your children all the time. I was trying to work, my husband then said this is ridiculous stop working, so I just took on the kids. (Fiona, children aged 12, 16, & 18)

Some mothers ($n=4$) like Fiona found that the time and energy it took to parent gifted children was so constant and intense that they were unable to work. Amy described the enormous demand raising gifted children had on her, particularly navigating an educational system she perceived as unable to cope with her son's gifted characteristics, behaviours and learning needs:

Our whole life is micro managing this kid so he can function and enjoy life in a system that's not set up to cater for these kids at all. So, I can't work, put it that way. (Amy, children aged 3 & 9)

Furthermore, Bridget explained the impact parenting gifted children had on her ability to work fulltime.

It's always a struggle. I cannot see how I could possibly work fulltime and advocate for my children because I am constantly advocating for them whilst at the same time trying not to sound like a nagger. (Bridget, children aged 12 & 15)

In addition to some mothers not being able to work fulltime because of multiple demands of raising gifted children, some mothers ($n=5$) reported exhaustion due to the effort involved in finding resources for themselves, their children, and mentors or extracurricular activities to plug the gap when their children were not receiving material at school that was challenging enough. For example, Judy described the impact of driving hours each day for her son to receive an education that met his needs: *I have chronic fatigue, which I think is a direct result of ... I travelled a long way with my son to a one-day-school every week for terms and I got sick. (Judy, children aged 12, 15, & 17)*

Sarah also described the additional strain on her time and energy when her son's giftedness was not well catered for within the regular classroom:

My son is in year 9 and tested and was over year 12 math in his mid-year exam and they can't do anything about that and that's really frustrating. We both work fulltime and now I have to find him a math program that will fulfil his needs and we will have to do it after school. (Sarah, children aged 12 & 14)

4.1.3 Maternal Anxiety

All mothers ($n=9$) reported experiencing some anxiety about their children's social, academic and emotional well-being and many mothers had worries about their children's future. All mothers described being impacted by multiple issues and concerns as listed by Mary as she described the behaviours and experiences of her children that worry her: *The intensity, the anxiety attacks, the perfectionism, the loneliness, friendships, having to work really hard to foster friendships that work* (Mary, children aged 9 & 6).

All mothers ($n=9$) described worries regarding their gifted children's abilities to make and maintain friendships due to being out-of-sync with most children their chronological age. Worries that their gifted child may never find a like-minded peer or experience true friendship was a common concern as highlighted by Amy: *Socially it's very, very hard to find like-minded peers.* (Amy, children aged 3 & 9).

Bridget also expressed worries that her twelve-year-old daughter has not yet found an intellectually like-minded peer: *"She hasn't found her people intellectually and that's a worry for me going into college."* The types of play the gifted children in this study wished to engage in and the intensity of the relationships they wanted to form were often advanced and therefore not well matched to their peers play behaviours. Judy describes being impacted by her child being out-of-sync socially:

They [gifted children] would love to have a big group of friends but kids don't know how to cope with them. My son, when he started his new school he was six and he would go and play soccer, he was so full of hope and he would know all 75 of the rules well. None of the kids wanted to know more than the first 3 and so he couldn't relate to them and that just killed me.
(Judy, children aged 17, 15, 12)

Many mothers ($n=7$) worried about their children's future. They worried that their children's cognitive potential would not be realised. Some mothers like Jane worried their children's passion for learning would be extinguished due to the lack of challenge in the regular classroom: *"It's like a little light that needs continual watching because I've seen some gifted kids, their light goes out and once they are out it's really hard to re-kindle them"* (Jane,

children aged 12 & 14). Judy described worrying that her children's intellectual potential would not be realized due to the effect of the societal misunderstanding of giftedness and the stigma that her children feel.

There is a high possibility that they won't [achieve their potential] because of who they are and because of the community around them and because of the lack of support and development and the labelling that goes with our society. I think it's very particular in New Zealand, it may be different overseas, but for New Zealanders it is more than likely, sitting where I am, that they won't achieve (Judy, children aged 17, 15, 12).

Some mothers ($n=5$) worried about their children's emotional or mental health. Suicide and depression were a worry for some mothers. And many mothers noted the impact of their children's own emotional well-being on themselves. Judy reported that due to her children's giftedness and sensitivity to world issues she dealt with 'depression at age four' (Judy, children aged 12, 15 & 17). Amy also described worries about the high rate of suicide amongst gifted youth, noting that her son surviving the culture milieu and education system was now her biggest concern:

One of my biggest concerns from what I read in the first book I got out of the library when we got the diagnosis, I am pretty bad at remembering stats, you have to forgive me, but I think they suspected something like 60% of youth suicides in Australia and New Zealand were actually gifted kids. And that is my biggest fear. I've gone from starting out thinking I really want my son to get a good education, I just wanted him to thrive and everything, and you know what, I don't care if he fails every subject for the rest of his life now, I just want him to survive. I mean I know he will catch up if he is behind in anything, but the social side of it and the effect the schooling system and our culture has on these kids, I just want him to survive (Amy, children aged 3 & 9).

Mothers reported that their own well-being was affected by their children's well-being. For example, Bridget described how her own well-being was impacted when her child was feeling distressed about school issues:

In terms of my own well-being ... if he's crying I will cry as well ... I feel their pain and my husband says sometimes that I get a little bit too caught up, this isn't my battle, I need to just support. And I know that, but it doesn't

stop me worrying or doesn't stop me getting upset when they do (Bridget, children aged 12 & 15).

4.1.4 Maternal stress

All mothers ($n=9$) described the negative effects on their wellbeing of stressful experiences such as dealing with school issues, the identification of giftedness, and the compounding effect of multiple concerns related to their children's giftedness.

Dealing with schools who did not understand giftedness and were not providing appropriate educational provisions was stressful for all mothers. School was consistently noted as one of the greatest impacts on the well-being of the mothers in this study. Although the full extent of the challenges mothers experienced from the school system is covered in more detail within the services domain, it is important to touch on school issues within this domain as many mothers reported dealing with their children's school as having a major impact on their well-being. Susan described the stress she felt not being able to affect change within the school system to make school better for her child.

We have a gifted child and there are things that we can do, but there are also things that we can't do. Like we can't make the school do more for her, and that's really hard to explain to someone, she's going 'why can't you make this better'. And there is no answer to that, the issues are the education system, they are not about her. I am sure if the teachers knew more or cared more they could do more, but they are sort of like weighing up one kid (Susan, mother of 12-year-old).

Some mothers ($n=4$) described the process of identification of their children's giftedness as stressful. Amy described finding out what was going on with her child stressful, reporting that she knew her child was different to other children his age but due to the lack of understanding of giftedness from professionals resulted in stress and going down many wrong tracks.

It was stressful. It was really, really hard work and every [gifted] kid is different. No-one understands. So, for us because he didn't meet any criteria we really just felt like all the doors were slammed in our faces. Everyone just went too hard, we don't know what's going on, you're on your own. And that was really frustrating and upsetting because he wasn't

enjoying school, he just wasn't coping. You know as a parent when something is really wrong (Amy, children aged 3 & 9).

Susan also described the stress of not knowing what was wrong with your child but knowing they are different somehow resulted in frustration, stress and exhaustion. When considering the biggest impact on her wellbeing, Susan reported that the process of identification, which had taken until her daughter was 11-years-old, had impacted her own well-being tremendously: *It's like when your kid has any, can I say aberration and you don't know what it is so you spend your whole time wondering what is wrong with her. So, it's been stressful. I feel exhausted (Susan, mother of 12-year-old).*

All mothers spoke of the influence of multiple issues across many settings impacting negatively upon their wellbeing. Some mothers who were raising multiple gifted children felt the impact of the extra demands on their role as a mother were more pronounced. Helen described having difficulty focusing on the good things in life when, because of her children's giftedness, she was faced with multiple challenges each week.

Depending on how your weeks been sometimes you do focus on the negatives because you've been through challenging times and that's the stuff that stands out dealing with schools or dealing with friends or family who don't understand it (Helen, children aged 12 & 14).

Some mothers ($n = 4$) reported that due to experiencing multiple demands from numerous settings the positive impacts of raising a gifted were often difficult to see. This point is summed up by Judy in the following quote:

The challenge is not quite equated by the rewards yet, but that is always going to be the case as long as giftedness is not identified in its full capacity and the full context, then your rewards are always going to be offset by the challenges. (Judy, children aged 12, 15 & 17)

4.2 Psychological Resources

All mothers in this study described ways their maternal experience had been enriched, and many ($n=8$) described personal gains and benefits they may not have experienced had they not been raising a gifted child. Nevertheless, it was evident that the

mothers in this study found it more difficult to describe the positive impact of raising intellectually gifted children than they did describing the more challenging experiences or impacts. The quote below illustrates this point.

The positives seem to be quite intangible at this point. I find her really hard work. I'm finding it really hard to find positives and I feel really selfish saying that and it feels really wrong ... how would I feel if it was the opposite and she was struggling to read. It's all relative isn't it? (Susan, mother of 12-year-old).

Despite the difficulties, some mothers like Susan experienced articulating positive personal implications in raising a gifted child, it was through coping with the extra demands of raising a gifted child that mothers experiences personal growth and an increase in knowledge and skills.

4.2.1 Enriched Maternal Experience

All mothers reported feeling that their maternal experience had in some way been enriched because of their child's gifted behaviours or characteristics. Many mothers described a number of joyful and positive experiences. They felt pride in their child's achievements, wonder at the potential they had to offer society, and felt a closeness to their children as they bonded over a shared love of learning and engagement in world issues. Some mothers relished the richness and extra demands associated with raising intellectually gifted children and couldn't imagine life any other way as summarised by one mother:

I think generally it [giftedness] makes our parenting experience a while lot richer. It's a more intense experience because of their intensities. It's almost like if I just had regular kids now I would be bored. It would just be too easy. (Mary, children aged 9 & 6)

Fiona explained the joy she experiences in her role as mother to her 3 gifted children:

I love that they just get stuff. That they're so alive inside and they are so connected with life. There's a real layer of vitality there, they are curious, they are interested. You know, that just makes it fun and they are really cool people and they are complex and interesting. (Fiona, children aged 12, 16 & 18)

All mothers spoke of feelings of awe and excitement regarding their child's intellectual voracity, ability to learn and assimilate information quickly, and advancement or potential when compared to same-aged-peers. Many parents like Judy were surprised and 'blown away' by their child's achievements and intense passions, and experienced a sense of pride and joy watching their children excel.

Just looking at my three [gifted children] I think the most positive thing is their potential. These kids, what they've achieved in the 17 years I've known these kids, what they have achieved is amazing. I'm blown away. What they can do and what they are doing is incredible. (Judy, children aged 12, 15, & 17)

Mary also described the pride she felt watching her children achieve at a high level and be recognized by others for their achievements.

Just being in awe of the kids because they are so amazing to watch.... Now it's when you see other people taking joy in their talents as well. They start to get recognized out in the real world so that makes a parent proud. (Mary, children aged 6 & 9)

Gifted children's potential to achieve greatness was a source of wonder and delight for many parents. These parents felt excitement at the possibilities for their children's future and felt hope that they may create positive change in society. A quote by Jane illustrates this sense of hope for the future.

I do wonder what they will accomplish. So, I would like to think that they will do something good and useful. It sounds too pompous to say for humanity but I would like to think that they, that gifted kids will use their gifts well and for positive change because I think the amount of passion that you see in them and the sort of lifelong learning that I think they have, they can accomplish really good things if they chose to do so. (Jane, children aged 12 & 14)

The goodness-of-fit between mothers who were often gifted themselves and their gifted children meant the intellectual stimulation these children presented with was a source of enjoyment for most ($n = 8$) mothers in this study. Many mothers such as Bridget reported close bonds with their gifted children. Their children's giftedness resulted in a sharing of

passions, deep intellectual discussion, and enjoyment in learning experiences from an early age.

The most positive thing I think is the joy in creating a passionate little being that is like my husband and I. There is a lot of joy in seeing them develop and helping to forge the way for them. They fit with my husband and me, we are quite different as well and they are such a delight. The conversations are amazing, the concepts that they have. They are just really good company. They are a delight to take places, they are interested in everything and their sense of humour is just hilarious. (Bridget, children aged 12 & 15)

Sarah also described the positive impact of being a gifted mother raising gifted children and the joy that brings to the parenting experience.

It's fun because they are so quirky, we have a lot of fun and we are really close. Because of their special thoughts we are on the same wavelength. I think I'm a bit crazy too and we just have these amazing discussions and that's a really positive impact. (Sarah, children aged 12 & 14).

Fiona, a mother of three gifted boys described the close emotional and intellectual connection and the depth and breadth of her parenting experiences due to her children's giftedness.

That emotional connect is really beautiful and the intellectual part It's wonderful because they can interconnect so much. We're having a family experience of doing something and they are alive and learning and that connect is there as well. Those moments are always there as a parent, but there's a real depth and breadth to it. (Fiona, children aged 12, 16, & 18)

The extra demands the mothers in this study perceived as being associated with raising gifted children were relished and enjoyed by many mothers ($n=5$). These mothers enjoyed the intellectual stimulation their gifted children provided and they couldn't imagine experiencing as rewarding a reciprocal relationship with children who were not intellectually gifted. As highlighted by Judy's thoughts: *"I love it [raising gifted children] I wouldn't have it any other way, I know I wouldn't have it any other way because I find other kids really boring."* (Judy, children aged 12, 15, & 17).

Jane also explained how home-schooling her gifted children often resulted in exhaustion, however she didn't feel this was a burden. *"So, the kids will occasionally say you're looking tired, do you sort of wish you didn't do this? And I go NEVER! There is never a moment that I would trade my life."* (Jane, children aged 12 & 14)

4.2.2 Personal Growth

Many mothers ($n=8$) reported experiencing a number of positive personal gains related to raising their gifted children. Through discovery of their children's giftedness many mothers ($n=5$) became aware of their own intellectual giftedness, learnt more about common characteristics of giftedness, how these applied to themselves and gained a greater understanding of the context of their own educational experiences. In order to cope with the extra demands of raising intellectually gifted children all mothers researched information on giftedness and parenting gifted children in order to better understand their own children. Through the information gathering process some mothers ($n=4$) were inspired to engage in further formal education in giftedness. Some mothers ($n=5$) utilised their increased knowledge regarding giftedness to help other families who were going through similar experiences. These mothers reported experiencing pleasure from advocating for others.

The quote below by Fiona describes the experience of personal growth shared by many ($n=8$) of the mothers. Reflecting on her journey raising her three gifted sons who are now adolescents, Fiona reported that personal growth occurred because of the challenges faced raising her sons and for that reason the journey of raising three gifted children had been a personal blessing.

Probably the challenge [raising gifted children], which was hard, has been a blessing because it's catapulted me into understanding myself more deeply and really growing myself as a person and actually I would never ever want to change that. So, there is real existential growth for me. Having kids and them being different and then home-schooling and trying to figure stuff out, how to home-school, how to parent well, really turned me on an inward journey to really start sorting my own crap. So, it's been a real blessing and things have really worked out from it. Like all good journeys it's hard, but afterwards they're good. (Fiona, children aged 12, 16, 18)

Some mothers ($n=5$) regarded becoming aware of their own giftedness as having a positive impact on themselves and their well-being. Bridget, through seeking out information to support her gifted children, came to understand her own giftedness and her childhood experiences more deeply.

I think that learning about all these things for me has been really interesting and I can identify a lot of myself... I can see a lot of myself in the articles I am reading. I sometimes see more of myself in the articles than I do of my kids. So that's been positive as I have come to understand myself even more and come to understand some things from my childhood and probably other people in my life as well. (Bridget, children aged 12 & 15).

When considering what it was about raising gifted children that had the greatest impact on her well-being, Mary described becoming more self-aware as a major positive factor.

I think it's what they teach you about yourself. Research shows that usually gifted kids will be born from gifted parents so it's made me think 'oh maybe I'm gifted' and that's something that I never in a million years would have thought about. It's made me think about my own childhood and how I felt and my own experience of childhood. So, it's all the learning you do alongside them. (Mary, children aged 9 & 6)

To cope with the demands of parenting intellectually gifted children and in the face of a lack of information provided to them, all mothers ($n=9$) actively sought information to understand intellectual giftedness better. Most sought this information from online resources and/or books as highlighted by Mary: *I read stuff online, I read books and I've done quite a lot of research to make sense of it all. (Mary, children aged 6 & 9).*

Some mothers ($n=4$) had discovered a passion for the study of giftedness and often, motivated by a desire to advocate for gifted children, had engaged in, or planned to engage in formal education in giftedness. For example: *I've gone into training to help advocate for kids and families who don't have money or don't have a parent that can completely devote themselves, so how do they do it. (Judy, children aged 12, 15 & 17).*

Some mothers, such as Amy, gained pleasure from utilizing their knowledge of intellectual giftedness to help other families in similar situations:

I have read so many books on giftedness and I became a lot more self-aware to the point where I now reach out to people and I'm able to help them through my experience in my reading and that makes me feel good and that's a positive. (Amy, children aged 3 & 9)

Fiona also described gaining altruistic benefits from advocating for gifted children in her community by taking action and organizing a specialized educational opportunity: *I organized for one-day-school to get started where we live. So that's been good for me too because I feel like I've given something back to the community. (Fiona, children aged 12, 16, & 18).*

Most mothers experienced multiple collateral benefits while raising their gifted children. The following quote by Sarah provides an example of the multifaceted benefits and personal growth experienced by many of the mothers in this study. For Sarah these collateral benefits included cognitive, social and emotional gains and growth:

You never get bored. You're always busy and pushed out of your comfort zone, which can be really positive because you start to explore things, and find different resourcing and become resourceful, and meet lots of different people for the good of your child. And for me it's been for the good of my children but also for myself. If my children didn't need these extra things beyond basic schooling or that basic school offers I wouldn't have done all of this. Sometimes I've been able to access my own creativity and grow there. I have learnt a lot of things and enjoyed a lot of things that I normally wouldn't have. (Sarah, children aged 12 & 14)

4.3 Domain 2: Family Implications

The second domain describes the implications raising an intellectually gifted child has on the family. Family in this study relates to immediate and extended family members. Mothers reported that their experience raising their gifted children resulted in a number of family demands (strains) and capabilities (resources) and a brief description of each of these factors can be found in Table 3.2. Family demands are clustered together under the heading 'strains' and are made up by three main factors: 1) children's gifted behaviours 2) lack of

extended family support and 3) marital conflict. Family capabilities are clustered together under the heading 'resources' and are made up of two main factors: 1) family closeness, and 2) extended family support.

Table 4-2 Family implications reported by mothers of intellectually gifted children

Factors	Description
Family Strains	
Behaviour problems and gifted child characteristics	Mothers reported family challenges managing their children's gifted behaviours such as asynchronous development, overexcitabilities and intensities. Gifted behaviours sometimes limited 'normal' family activities.
Lack of extended family support	Lack of understanding and empathy for the challenges of parenting gifted children from extended family.
Marital conflict	Mothers experienced lack of a shared parenting alliance and tension in decision making with regard to giftedness.
Family Resources	
Family closeness	Goodness-of-fit with family and extended family culture due to giftedness running in families.
Extended family support	Emotional and physical support for parents from extended family.

4.3.1 Family Strains

4.3.2 Behaviour Problems and Gifted Characteristics

All mothers described their children's behaviours and characteristics related to giftedness such as asynchronous development, over excitabilities and intensities as impacting upon their family life. Judy made note of multiple overexcitabilities that her children experienced which resulted in behaviour problems at home:

Intense emotional responses and intense reactions to light, sound, people, ideas. And that flowed over into not sleeping, fussiness with food, and reactions to people. We had depression at four-years-old, so for me it's the intensity that's the hardest thing. (Judy, children aged 12, 15, & 17)

Helen also described difficulty dealing with challenging behaviours such as perfectionism, anxiety, increased sensitivity and meltdowns:

So my daughter is a classic gifted child, gets anxious, is a real perfectionist. She's very black and white, is sensitive to a lot of things. When we got her tested it was like a light bulb went on because we had struggled with her challenging behaviour for years and not known what to do. She'd hit us, she'd kick us, all that classic kind of gifted stuff, just totally overwhelmed a lot of the time. (Helen, children aged 12 & 14)

Some parents ($n=4$) reported that their child's gifted behaviours restricted family activities or what they considered 'normal' activities such as Christmas with extended family. Amy described the tremendous impact her son's behaviours had on her and her family and their ability to enjoy 'normal' activities.

So with my son we are very, very planned. Everything has to be at the same time. Dinner at 6.00pm, bath at 6:30pm, bed at 7.00pm. And he doesn't cope in busy or noisy environments like a shopping mall or supermarket or anything like that. So our world was quite limited. Like we couldn't even really do Christmas day with my in-laws family because there was too much going on and that affected him physically. He would have meltdowns there was just too much going on. He basically got overloaded. And going through that year after year, there were times my husband and I just thought why couldn't we just have a normal kid, an average kid. And I think at some point you begin to resent it. (Amy, children aged 3 & 9)

4.3.3 Lack of Extended Family Support

Some mothers ($n=4$) described a lack of extended family support for themselves or their children. Giftedness was something some extended family members had difficulty understanding. Some mothers noted a lack of empathy and support for the challenges they experienced raising their gifted children. Judy described negative reactions to her children's giftedness from her extended family and in-laws which constrained the social support available from these family members.

My Mother, which is horrifying but it's really a statement of the generation I think, she told me my kids were freaks one day and that basically encapsulated my families point of view. However, my family are freaks as well. My husband's family are a little more insular, they just choose not to be a part of the conversation so we don't talk about our kids. We don't share a lot of the information and we definitely don't share the problems. We will share some of the successes but we never share the issues. (Judy, children aged 12, 15, & 17)

4.3.4 Marital Conflict

Some mothers ($n=3$) reported increased marital conflict due to the lack of a shared parenting alliance when making decisions about their children's giftedness. Helen sums up some of the challenges parents experience collectively when deciding how best to cater for their gifted child.

At times it's been really hard because the behaviour has been challenging. We don't know what to do so sometime my husband and I end up arguing about it, about what we are doing and how we handle it. It hasn't been easy and at times we've been on the opposite sides of the fence trying to work out what we are going to do. (Helen, children aged 12 & 14)

4.4 Family Resources

4.4.1 Family Closeness

Some mothers ($n=4$) reported various family members experienced pride in their children's achievements. Sarah described her mother's pride in her children's achievements: *My mums awful ha-ha, she's so proud of them [gifted grandkids] she just goes around town telling everybody all their achievements. (Sarah, children aged 12 & 14)*

Some mothers ($n=4$) also felt that their children's giftedness fitted with their family culture of giftedness and that this resulted in acceptance and understanding. Fiona noted this goodness-of-fit between her gifted children and wider family: *Well that's kind of good because everyone is bright and accepting. (Fiona, children aged 12, 16, & 18)*

4.4.2 Extended Family Support

More than half of the mothers in this study ($n=5$) reported on extended family support. Interestingly, many parents who spoke of a lack of family support also noted at least one member of their family who provided them with support. Support involved understanding and acceptance of the challenges of parenting and practical support for parents such as taking the gifted children to activities of interest or driving them to activities as described by Bridget:

My Dad is an amazing chauffeur so he drives my daughter to gym, which is half an hour away once a week. He used to pick her up from one-day-school so that kind of practical support meant quite a lot because I really noticed it when he went away on holiday. My parents always look out for things of interest to take the kids to. So I'm really lucky that I have a lot of family support and people looking for stuff that will stimulate the kids. (Bridget, children aged 12 & 15)

4.5 Domain 3: Social Implications

The third domain is used to describe the implications of raising an intellectually gifted child on mother's social support and impact of community level demands and resources. Mothers reported that their experience raising their gifted children resulted in a number of social and community level demands (strains) and capabilities (resources) and a brief description of each of these factors can be found in Table 3.3. Social or community demands are clustered together under the heading 'strains' and are made up of three main factors: 1) social isolation, 2) stigma and 3) tall-poppy-syndrome. Social and community level capabilities are clustered together under the heading 'resources' and are made up of one main factor: 1) social support.

Table 4-3 Social implications reported by mothers of intellectually gifted children

Factors	Description
Social Strains	

Social isolation	Mothers perceived their social relationship to be negatively impacted. They experienced reduced social opportunities and loss of friendships due their role as mothers of gifted children. Mothers experienced social isolation across multiple contexts due to a lack of understanding of intellectual giftedness and a lack of awareness regarding maternal challenges related to raising gifted children. Social isolation was also due to their own giftedness impacting upon their role as a mother.
Stigma	Mothers felt unable to discuss their children's giftedness and associated parenting challenges for fear of negative attitudes due to a lack of knowledge, acceptance and awareness of giftedness in New Zealand society.
Tall-poppy-syndrome	Mothers were impacted by egalitarian ideals, and the tendency to cut down those who stand out academically, both were noted as prevalent within New Zealand culture.
Social Resources	
Social support	Mothers sought social support from closed social media groups and specialised support groups. Their children's giftedness created opportunities to meet others who shared similar experiences and create new support networks. Mothers felt joy when they found other individuals in the community who understood their children.

4.5.1 Social Strains

4.5.2 Social Isolation

All mothers recalled feeling profound social isolation in their role as a mother of intellectually gifted children. When considering the greatest impact raising gifted children had had on their own well-being, all mothers mentioned the social implications as being a significant strain. Speaking of the greatest impact on her own well-being Judy, described the loneliness and isolation that comes with being a parent of an intellectually gifted children: *the biggest thing is that you are on your own. There's little to no sense of community as a parent.* (Judy, children aged 12, 15, & 17)

Amy also described the profound sense of social isolation and lack of social support available to her: *It's very lonely and very isolating. It can be really, really lonely, and also you don't have the opportunity to share and talk about your problems with people that understand, it's isolating. (Amy, children aged 3 & 9).*

Fiona sums up the social isolation she experienced being a mother of three intellectually gifted sons and being unable to communicate the challenges that come with being a mother of gifted children due to others not understanding her situation:

The challenge is just sometimes the moments when I know that I have to work so much harder than other parents and it's hard and the support isn't there and the understanding isn't there. Standing in the school ground and it's like yeah I'm in a cultural minority here and that's how it's always been and that's how it always is and sometimes that just really sucks. Having to always make allowances for other people is exhausting. It's an unrecognized minority too, so you can't even let people know that it is a minority. They don't understand and it might just push their own buttons too. (Fiona, children aged 12, 16 & 18)

Some mothers ($n=6$) had lost friendships and social support because of their child's gifted diagnosis and some also perceived opportunities to make new friendships were constrained because they were unable to talk freely about their children without negative judgement.

Along the way we have lost friends when we have shared that my son is gifted and there's a misunderstanding about it. It's been quite isolating (Amy, children aged 3 & 9).

Judy described being impacted by the loss of a long-established mother support group once her child was identified as gifted:

I had a coffee group from anti-natal with my oldest. There were 6 of us and we met weekly for 13 years and then just after my son was identified as gifted we just stopped meeting. It just faded out. I learnt not to talk about my kids unless it was in relation to something their kids had done and we could be on par. (Judy, children aged 17, 15, 12)

Some mothers ($n=3$) spoke of the impact their own intellectual giftedness had on their sense of social isolation. These mothers spoke of difficulties fitting in and forming a community with other mothers due to being inherently different themselves. Bridget described feeling like she didn't fit with the other mothers in the groups she became part of as a young mother.

I've always been academically minded. After I had the kids the first sort of year in my coffee group was all good because we were all up to our eyeballs in nappies and bottles and whatever. And then we sort of started to get out of that stage and I realised I had nothing in common with these people. Then we moved to the community that we're in and I joined up with play centre and different things and there was nobody to really talk to and I looked around and went hardly any of these people have even gone to university, they don't have degrees, this is my intellectual snobbery but I can't meet on an intellectual level. I had to dumb down my language all the time and so I really understand where my daughter is coming from. (Bridget, children aged 12 & 15)

The challenges of being gifted and raising gifted children while trying to form a community as a new mother is highlighted by Fiona in the following quote:

For me I think [the most challenging thing], it's my own journey personally working with this whole sense of fitting in. It's like how do I fit in with these people [other mothers]. First of all, they're not like me in anyway. I have to be careful about what I say and then my kids are different so it's figuring out being a parent and then figuring out being a parent of a gifted kid and then doing the thing we do our whole lives anyway which is when you're in a minority group is making allowances for other people so you all belong, that's been the hardest thing. It's not particularly easy being a female in this society and being bright, and I guess it would be wonderful if people could understand that too. You can feel ostracized. (Fiona, children aged 12, 16, & 18)

4.5.3 Stigma

For many mothers raising a gifted child highlighted the social stigma attached to the gifted label. All mothers spoke of a misunderstanding of giftedness in New Zealand society which resulted in them feeling unable to talk about their children's giftedness or the unique challenges they faced as parents. Jane recalled feeling the stigma of giftedness by the way

other mothers at their school treated her and her family: *Socially it [giftedness] made us a bit of an outcast family (Jane, children 12 & 14).* Mary spoke of the stigma of giftedness impacting upon her ability to speak freely with others about her gifted children

The challenges are the stigma... you can't really talk to people about it [giftedness] because there is this, you see them nod off and shut their eyes and think everyone's kids are special. So, I really only speak to a few people about it and support groups and people who get it. (Mary, children aged 6 & 9)

Like Mary, many mothers in this study felt that they were unable to talk about their child's giftedness due to other's reactions. The stigma of intellectual giftedness became a barrier to social support. Judy described how the impact of the stigma of giftedness made it difficult to connect with and find other parents of gifted children as people were not open about their child's giftedness for fear of a negative reaction from others:

I wish there was more people on this particular bridge and I know that there is but because of the nature of our community it's almost like you have to draw a curtain around yourself and not share it. It's such a shame. (Judy, children aged 12, 15, & 17)

All mothers felt they were not able to share parenting challenges related to their children's giftedness due to societal misunderstandings about giftedness. They felt a general lack of empathy and understanding within New Zealand society for the unique challenges of their role as mothers of intellectually gifted children. Helen described the impact the misunderstanding of giftedness had on her role as a mother and the lack of empathy and understanding for the challenges she faced.

We don't really talk about it [giftedness] with people unless they've got gifted kids to be honest. I've learnt the hard way that you just don't. People think you're just bragging but they don't realise all the other challenges that come along with it... There is a lack of empathy of your situation or a lack of understanding of giftedness. (Helen, children aged 12 & 14)

Many parents ($n=7$) felt more education and awareness in society was needed to help combat the misunderstanding about intellectual giftedness. Sarah highlighted this point in the following quote:

People always say oh they are complaining about being too smart or something, but it's not about that so there is still a lot of education to be done around that for people as well. (Sarah, children aged 12 & 14).

Bridget also felt that more awareness about giftedness was something that would and could make a positive difference to her maternal experiences:

A bit more awareness. I'm not great for that myself, I sort of keep quiet about my kids so that I don't sound like I'm boasting but I think we probably need strong people to stand up and say hey this is a thing and there are challenges. I'm not saying my child is better than your child, all I'm saying is this is my child and this is what they need. (Bridget, children aged 12 & 15)

Helen also described the lack of social support given to mothers of gifted children due to the lack of understanding of the difficulties of parenting gifted children.

So it can be very lonely and very tough and very hard so you need that support and you don't always get it from your nearest and dearest because they don't get it. They just think you're lucky that you've got a child who is never going to struggle academically. (Helen, children aged 12 & 14)

4.5.4 Tall-Poppy-Syndrome

New Zealand society's egalitarian ideals and the prevalence of the Tall-Poppy-Syndrome was highlighted by over half the mothers ($n=6$) in this study. Many families had experienced negativity or disregard when their children were achieving. For example Sarah, when considering her experiences in the community, noted that, "NZ does still have that tall-poppy problem doesn't it. The tendency to want to cut people off if they are doing too well" (Sarah, children aged 12 & 14). Furthermore, Judy explained the negativity that was directed at her when her gifted children were publicly excelling.

We very, very strongly felt the tall poppy complex with our eldest two. If my eldest daughter who sings, appeared on stage more than once a year I

would get negatives. I find it really hard to explain actually, there was just a lot of negativity. (Judy, children aged 12, 15, & 17).

Fiona highlighted the negative impact the tall-poppy-syndrome in New Zealand had had on her and her family.

I think its shit, we live in such a terrible tall-poppy society where everyone has to fit in, unless you do sport then that's okay. It's not actually easy to be really bright or gifted because you stand out and it triggers everybody else's sense of insecurity, so then they start to take revenge. (Fiona, children 12, 16, & 18)

Some mothers ($n=4$) felt the 'gifted' label itself did not help others in society appreciate and understand the complete experience of giftedness or the complexities of parenting gifted children. Some mothers noted that many people believed gifted children and parents had an advantage, noting that this myth had resulted in the desire to pull those individuals and families down or disregard their experiences. As highlighted by the following quote by Judy who, speaking of tall-poppy-syndrome noted that the label 'gifted' was inaccurate and unhelpful.

The label is the problem, if we said to someone we've got high intensity, and all these other symptoms and put them in the label then you would get an acknowledgement. The fact that 'gift' is in the label turns everyone's ears off. (Judy, children aged 12, 15, & 17)

Mary also felt the label giftedness resulted in inaccurate ideas about the ease of mothering gifted children.

I think the idea of giftedness is still really inaccurate and it's just linked to the academic like a 4 year old doing algebra. It's just what people think it is, the perception. It's almost like it just needs to be called asynchronous development because these kids struggle with certain things and are amazing at others and have these intensities and it doesn't really feel like a gift. It needs another term. (Mary, children aged 6 & 9)

4.5.5 Social Resources

4.5.6 Social Support

Most mothers ($n=8$) reported coping with negative social implications by actively seeking informal social support from other parents in similar situations through social media or in person. Social media groups were a major source of support for almost all mothers ($n=8$) who found they were able to share successes, worries and concerns in the context of understanding. For Judy, support for the challenges of parenting a gifted child was sought through membership in multiple closed gifted parenting Facebook groups: *My community or my support is mainly on Facebook. I belong to about 6 or 7 groups on Facebook ... which are great. (Judy, children aged 12, 15, & 17)*

Amy was emphatic regarding the role Facebook groups had in combating her social isolation and providing much needed support when she was struggling with the challenges of parenting her gifted child.

I'm very new to Facebook. I pretty much disagreed with it, but via someone I knew I was recommended the 'parents of gifted children support group' Facebook page and that has basically saved my life to be honest with you. I was in such a bad way. (Amy, children aged 3 & 9)

Many mothers ($n=6$) reported that their child's giftedness created opportunities for new social networks for themselves, and some mothers reported gaining new friendships. Valuable social support from other parents with gifted children who were going through similar experiences was noted. Jane spoke of experiencing reciprocal social support from other mothers who also had gifted children.

The people who I have meet that have really helped me out have had really exceptional kids themselves and we've basically cried on each other's shoulders (Jane, children 12 & 14).

Amy also described being helped through a challenging time with her gifted children by another mother who understood and had similar experiences herself:

Two years ago, a lady reached out to me, a former principal with three gifted kids, and her kids were older and she had been through it all before, and she listened, and she got everything. We became very close friends now and it really helped me through a difficult time in my life. (Amy, children aged 3 & 9)

As expressed by Jane and Amy above, finding someone who ‘gets’ giftedness was key to accessing appropriate informal social support for the mothers in this study. However, as Fiona points out in the following quote, finding someone who ‘gets’ giftedness is difficult:

I guess actually as I answer this it makes me realise that when someone gets them and/or gets me and parenting them that’s a rare thing. So when that recognition is there it’s a real relief and lovely and precious. (Fiona, children aged 12, 16, & 18)

4.6 Domain 4: Services

The last domain describes mother’s experiences with services and the impact these experiences had on them. Mothers reported that their experience with services through raising their gifted children resulted in a number of demands (strains) and capabilities (resources) and these are described in Table 3.4. Demands are clustered together under the heading ‘strains’ and are made up of three main factors: 1) lack of knowledgeable and understanding by professionals, 2) lack of resources and government funding and 3) parents disregarded / labelled ‘pushy’. Capabilities are clustered together under the heading ‘resources’ and are made up of three main factors: 1) specialist schools and organisations, 2) exemplary schools and individuals, and 3) changing schools / home schooling.

Table 4-4 Implications of services accessed by mothers of intellectually gifted children

Factors	Description
Service Strains	

Lack of knowledgeable and understanding professionals	Lack of teacher, psychologist and other professional training on giftedness. Misunderstanding about giftedness across most services led to inappropriate accommodations and inflexible systems.
Lack of resources and government funding	Mothers experienced a general lack of targeted resources and described a lack of funding and resourcing through publicly funded education system. Mothers felt tension asking for support for gifted children's needs when the education system is under-resourced and overwhelmed with the needs of many others.
Parents disregarded	Parent's knowledge of their gifted children and their educational needs was disregarded and mothers reported feeling the effects of the 'pushy parent' label within the school system.
Service Resources	
Specialist schooling and organisations	Specialist schooling provided mothers peace of mind that their children's educational, social and emotional needs were being met. Organisations provided mothers with resources and support.
Exemplary individuals and schools	Individual professionals and schools who understood giftedness provided exemplary services to gifted children and their families.
Changing schools / home-schooling	Mother exhibited action-oriented positive coping by moving schools or home-schooling in order to find the right educational, social and emotional fit for their children.

4.6.1 Service Strains

4.6.2 Lack of Professional Knowledge and Understanding

All mothers felt frustration at the lack of professional knowledge, understanding and resources available from services which gifted children and their parents seek access. A general lack of services for gifted children and families was expressed by the majority of mothers ($n=7$).

Amy eloquently sums up the frustration felt by many mothers in this study regarding a lack of resources, professional knowledge and training:

One of the biggest things that I've found is there is no resources. Most of the time even when I have met with psychologists we are educating people about gifted children, we are educating schools. They have no training, they have no comprehension or knowledge on how to cope with these kids or how these kids tick or anything. There's no central reference point for help for families. (Amy, children aged 3 & 9)

All mothers highlighted their frustration with the lack of knowledge and appropriate educational provisions within the schools their children were currently attending. Amy's advocacy experience was characterised by educational professionals with little knowledge of giftedness and school systems that were inflexible:

We met with the SENCO [Special Education Needs Coordinator] who knew absolutely nothing about gifted kids. And you know my sons really good with computers and they [the school] had a coding club and in year 2 he was doing year 4 work and they said oh no the coding club is only for years 3 to 6. And we were like can you just let him have a go, ... and I offered to go in to the school and support him ... but they said absolutely no, everything was a no, just doors slammed in our face. It just got harder and harder and he just got more and more miserable and it just got to the point where we could no longer work with the school. (Amy, children aged 3 & 9)

Some mothers (n=4) described being frustrated not only with the lack of professional understanding of giftedness within the school setting but also across other child health services such as psychologists and doctors. Judy explains her experience with a child psychologist who lacked an awareness of the characteristics of gifted children:

I spent one session with a lady who's been a child psychologist for 35 years and I spent the hour unpacking for her a gifted child and only one gifted child. I then said to her I've got three and they are as different as chalk and cheese. How can you be a child psychologist of 30 years and not be aware of these kids. (Judy, children aged 17, 15, 12)

The lack of professional knowledge across the services that gifted children reside was seen as a barrier to accessing appropriate services. All mothers called for more education of

teachers in the needs, characteristics and educational accommodations for gifted children. Amy spoke of teacher training in giftedness being the most important target area for positive change for gifted children and their families:

The biggest thing I would like to see is just more support for these children in the school system and I would like to see teaching colleges have a mandatory module on gifted children (Amy, children aged 3 & 9).

Helen also stressed the importance of teacher training for combating the misunderstanding of giftedness she had experienced in schools in New Zealand:

I think that the level of training that teachers get about giftedness is absolutely woeful because every school has them and a lot of it is misunderstood or missed. (Helen, children aged 12 & 14)

4.6.3 Lack of Resources and Funding

Some mothers ($n=4$) described the lack of government funding as having an impact on the ability of teachers to provide appropriate accommodations within the classroom. Helen saw the cut to targeted government funding for gifted children as an indication of the lack of understanding about the needs of the gifted.

The government made a cut to gifted funding a few years ago and it really went under the radar. There wasn't much protest. It's like, oh those kids don't need funding because they'll do well anyway, but actually they don't. (Helen, children aged 12 & 14)

Additionally, the mothers in this study who resided in smaller communities ($n=3$) felt resources for gifted children and their families was significantly less than that offered in larger communities and that cuts in government funding had further constrained access. Sarah described the impact of the lack of funding on smaller communities and the feeling of guilt she experienced asking for resourcing for her gifted children in a climate where there is a lack of funding for other needs in schools.

You look at public education and you realise that gifted and talented children are everywhere and not just in big cities. Actually in smaller communities they need more support and more opportunities and I would

like to see the one-day-school or GATE be funded. I know it used to be funded in NZ and I am sure one-day school used to be in our community a while ago, but there is no funding and no coordinator now. We need some kind of access to those. And in schools there's a lot of programs that only happen in the cities and again they used to happen in rural communities but they don't anymore so children really miss out on that. And the awareness, its tough isn't it you could say that identifying gifted and talented children in schools and in different programs is a priority, but you already know they are no underfunded for other things as well. (Sarah, children aged 12 & 14)

Furthermore, Judy's experience highlighted the disparity between what publicly funded schools could offer by the way of gifted provisions and that of private schools.

There was no gate programs, there was no extension within the classroom and then the gate teacher ... said we can't do anything more for him but there is a private school, if you can afford it do that, so we did. (Judy, children aged 12, 15, & 17).

Judy also expressed her frustration with the lack of knowledge and funding to help support gifted children in the regular classroom:

The lack of understanding! Schools don't really want to acknowledge they have gifted kids because they don't really have the time or the facility or the education or the patience. So that's where I think New Zealand could do better, educate. But it comes down to funding and everything else trying to be unpacked in a classroom. (Judy, children aged 12, 15, & 17).

4.6.4 Parents Disregarded / Labelled as Pushy

All mothers ($n=9$) were impacted by their voices not being heard in the school setting. Their knowledge on giftedness and the needs of their own children were often disregarded. Sarah described the tension she felt being disregarded by teachers when explaining her child's need for more challenge in the classroom.

I was trying to explain to the teachers how they needed more challenges and things like that, and it was kind of pushed aside and I was really feeling a lot of tension about what to do. I'm a teacher and I'm trying to be understanding of the teachers and it's horrible to say my children are gifted and you're not catering for them. (Sarah, children aged 12 & 14)

Many mothers ($n=7$) reported that their children's unhappiness in the school setting was a catalyst for them advocating for provisions for them in the classroom. Helen described feeling upset when her daughters' school would not listen to or believe her concerns about her daughter.

The school were pretty awful. We said can you extend her and they said no she needs to be with the same age and we said honestly she's really unhappy she's coming home having tantrums and they said well she sits quietly in class, because she wants to be the perfect child. So she was perfect at school and diabolical at home but it was because she was really unhappy at school. They turned around and said well there is a big difference between gifted and talented; she's not gifted it's just bad parenting. So that was really upsetting and that's quite common among a lot of friends who have gifted children. People tell them the behaviour is just because you're a bad parent. It's really hard on gifted kid's parents. We've been through the ringer like a lot of parents. (Helen, children aged 12 & 14)

Some mothers reported negative experiences with teachers who did not believe their children were intellectually gifted, even when they provided them with psychological reports. Susan described being disregarded and labelled as pushy when she asked her daughter's teacher for more challenging work:

The teacher said to me are you sure! Because her current teacher doesn't really endorse this gifted concept and she said 'are you sure you are just not trying to do too much with her and not letting her just be a kid.' (Susan, mother of 12-year-old)

Bridget also experienced being disregarded by her child's teacher while advocating for appropriate educational accommodations for her gifted child:

I said to her you know she's gifted and she said 'what are you basing that on?' I said the educational physiologist report; you've seen it right? She kind of went no, then she just said 'well I haven't seen any of that so I don't believe it.' (Bridget, children age 12 & 15)

4.6.5 Service Resources

Although the services within the school system were generally regarded as a major strain, most mothers ($n=8$) had accessed and had positive experiences with specialist gifted

organisations and services. Furthermore, all mothers described exemplary individual professionals, teachers or schools. The services and individuals who were characterised as exemplary usually 'got giftedness', they understood the complexities of giftedness and were able to provide appropriate services.

4.6.6 Specialist Services and Organisations

Specialist services and organisations set up specifically to provide support to families and/or cater for the educational needs of gifted children were accessed by most mothers ($n=8$) in this study. All mothers who experienced these services described positive impacts for themselves and their children. Amy explained the happiness she felt when her child made friends and found a place he belonged at a specialist gifted one-day-school.

You've got a kid who has been really lonely for years and years and he just walks in there [specialist one-day-school] and the kids fall over themselves to get to him. Will you play cricket with me, will you come to my table? They I hugging him and he gets a big beaming smile on his face and he just lives for his one-day-school days. That is the thing that brings the greatest joy to his little world. And makes me feel very sad because I think how many gifted kids can't afford it and are floundering a normal schools. In a perfect world I think specialist one-day-schools should be funded or part funded. People just don't understand the importance of the program that they do. You probably think I'm being dramatic but I really do feel like it's been lifesaving for my son. He feels accepted and safe and he's growing and he's learning and he's maturing. If he could go there every day, if such a thing existed, then I would do it in a heartbeat. I would sell everything I owned because you just want them to be happy. (Amy, children aged 3 & 9)

National gifted organisations also provided expert knowledge on giftedness and valuable support for some ($n=4$) of the mothers in this study. Many accessed resources on giftedness and some attended conferences and meetings facilitated by the organisations. Amy describing the value she experienced becoming a member of a national gifted organisation and having access to their resources:

We joined the NZAGC and their librarian is amazing and she sent me a lot of books that have really helped. (Amy, children aged 3 & 9)

4.6.7 Exemplary Individual Teachers or Schools

Individual teachers or schools were regarded positively by mothers. These schools or teachers offered flexibility in the school curriculum, were open to looking at catering to the individual needs of the child, and had expert knowledge on giftedness or were gifted themselves. Mothers also felt they were listened to and action was taken when and where it was needed. Bridget spoke of her son's educational needs being well catered for at the local high schools and the joy at finding a school that was open and receptive to her suggestion for more challenge.

He is in something called the innovation stream at college and that's quite good because it means they all stick together and they mix the subjects so they have combined subjects, future studies which is a science/math combo and it's a lot more integrated information and it's been a really good program for him. I did have to go in early on about week 5 and say he's looking for more, we are going to need more and they were really open and really receptive. So that was positive but it's always a struggle. (Bridget, children aged 12 & 15)

Finding the right school or the right individual was paramount to the mothers in this study. The right school or individual was someone who had expert knowledge, previous experience with gifted children or were gifted individuals themselves. Sarah describes the benefits of finding someone who *gets* giftedness and her child:

The psychologist, she was kind of quirky too and ... my daughter felt like she found someone who really understood her and she had this burst of confidence in herself. (Sarah, children aged 12 & 14)

Some mothers stressed the importance of shopping around for services until they found one that had knowledge and understanding of giftedness as highlighted in the following quote from Helen:

I've never had any problems with professionals because we've always kind of learnt that you have to find the right one first. (Helen, children aged 12 & 14)

4.6.8 Changing Schools / Home-schooling

When mothers felt their children's emotional, social or educational well-being was not being fostered in the school setting, almost all mothers ($n=8$) in this study had taken action and changed schools or moved to home-schooling. Amy described taking action when her son's well-being was being affected within a school that did not understand giftedness and how this ended positively:

I have jumped around schools though. The school he is at now is his 3rd school and you know there is chalk and cheese between the previous school and this one. This one they actually try, they have set up a chess club. There are better schools out there. (Amy, children aged 3 & 9)

Many mothers ($n=5$) in this study had home-schooled their child at some point during their schooling. Home-schooling was described as a positive experience both socially and educationally for the gifted children and their mothers. Jane described the home-schooling experience as being 'amazing' and provided her child with flexibility and challenge that wasn't possible in the school system: *So now for us home schooling has been absolutely amazing. (Jane, children aged 12 & 14)*

Fiona describes finding social support for herself when she began home-schooling:

When we ended up home schooling because it seemed that home education communities have disproportionate group of interesting parents with interesting kids and there was a place where I found a couple of other Mums. (Fiona, children aged, 12, 16, & 18)

4.7 Chapter Summary

The results showed that all mothers experienced a pile-up of demands from strains across all levels of the ecosystem in their roles as mothers of intellectually gifted children. Psychological strains included maternal exhaustion, anxiety, and stress, while family strains were derived from gifted child behaviours, a lack of extended family support, and marital conflict. Mothers reported being impacted tremendously by social strains including social isolation, the stigma of giftedness in society, and tall-poppy-syndrome. Finally, strains from services such as schools derived from a lack of knowledgeable and understanding

professionals, a lack of resources and government funding, and the disregard of parents knowledge and offers of support in the educational context.

Although mothers in this study experienced numerous strains in raising an intellectually gifted child and reported these strains to have greatly impacted their well-being, all mothers did report positive experiences and impacts. All mothers described psychological resources including an enriched maternal experience, personal growth and personal gains. Family resources including an increased family closeness and extended family support, and social resources such as social support were also described as having a positive impact on many of the mothers in this study. When considering service level resources, all mothers described positive experiences with specialist schooling and organisations, and exemplary individuals and schools. Furthermore, within the resources described, mothers frequently reported adaptive coping behaviours such as active problem-solving.

CHAPTER 5: Discussion

This study addressed the gap in the empirical literature on the impact of raising an intellectually gifted child. In order to gain a deeper understanding of the challenging and positive aspects of raising an intellectually gifted child, the following research questions were addressed through semi-structured interviews: 1) what is the nature and extent of the challenges and joys parents experience raising their intellectually gifted children?; 2) what impact does raising an intellectually gifted child have on parental well-being?; and 3) what are the coping resources parents of intellectually gifted children employ? Using the FAAR Model (Patterson, 1988; 2002) and the Bioecological Model (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006) to guide the analysis and interpretation of mother's interviews, the findings revealed that mothers experienced several strains and resources relating to raising an intellectually gifted child. These strains and resources were organised into four overarching dimensions: 1) psychological implications, 2) family implications, 3) social implications, 4) service implications.

The results revealed the utility of the FAAR model (Patterson, 1988; 2002) as a framework for understanding the impact of raising gifted children on mothers. The FAAR model proved particularly beneficial for the consideration of a balanced perspective of strains, resources and coping behaviours that mothers experience in parenting an intellectually gifted child. While the FAAR model has been utilised many times in the disability literature (Patterson, 2002), this is the first time the FAAR model has been used as a framework to understand giftedness.

5.1 Maternal Strains

Results of this qualitative study indicate that the parents of gifted children who participated in this study face unique challenges and demands related to raising an intellectually gifted child and this is consistent with previous research conducted in other countries and cultures (Alsop, 1997; Chellapan & Margrian, 2013; Free, 2017; Morawska & Sanders, 2009; Renati et al., 2017; Rimlinger, 2016). The findings of this study confirm that these challenges are complex, dynamic and stem from multiple layers of the mother's

ecosystem; schools, family, friends, child behaviours (Chellapan & Margrain, 2013; Free, 2017; Morawska & Sanders, 2009; Renati et al., 2017; Rimlinger, 2016) and cultural factors such as egalitarianism (Free, 2017).

The idea that the impact of these challenges can be detrimental to parent's wellbeing has been paid only cursory attention in the literature to date (Rimlinger, 2016; Free, 2017; Renati et al., 2017). The results from this study provide qualitative support to the recent quantitative investigation conducted by Rimlinger (2016) which found parents of intellectually gifted children had elevated levels of anxiety and parenting stress. Along with anxiety (Rimlinger, 2016) and stress (Renati et al., 2017; Rimlinger, 2016; Free, 2017) which has been reported in previous research as relating to the unique demands of parenting gifted children, exhaustion was a common factor all mothers in this study described and is something that had not been identified in previous studies. In fact, an enduring sense of exhaustion was the most commonly cited impact of raising a gifted child reported by the mothers in this study.

While exhaustion is a common experience of any parent raising young children (Dunning & Giallo, 2012; Giallo et al., 2011; Shen, Barbera, & Shapiro, 2006), the results from this study suggest that mothers raising intellectually gifted children may have additional demands requiring their attention and energy. For example, all mothers in this study described exhaustion resulting from child behaviours often cited in the literature as common amongst gifted populations, such as sleep problems, overexcitabilities, intensities and asynchronous development (Silverman, 2013). The findings indicate that the challenges associated with exhaustion are enduring and consistent across childhood and adolescents. This is highlighted in the finding that exhaustion was attributed to the relentlessness of these mother's role as advocates for their children in the school system. All mothers had experienced many years of fighting for their children to receive an education that meets their needs in a system and culture that afforded them limited attention, knowledge and understanding.

Another source of exhaustion for mothers can be found in the way they coped with the challenges of raising their gifted children. This is the first known study to report on the coping behaviours of New Zealand mothers of gifted children. The findings revealed that mothers actively sought information, social support and resources for their gifted child and themselves. They advocated strongly for their children across multiple contexts, many moved schools or homeschooled to find an appropriate educational fit and all mothers gained skills and knowledge in education and giftedness to support their children. While these types of coping behaviours are generally considered in the literature to be adaptive (Compas et al., 2015; Lai et al., 2015), the mothers in this study were often having to repeat these behaviours with no long-term resolution. It seemed exhaustion was the result of accumulated repeated stressors.

For example, a change of teacher or a move from primary school to intermediate school may result in mothers going through the same process of advocating they have engaged in many times before over many years. Additionally, over half the mothers in this study had engaged in home-schooling at some stage to meet the needs of their child. While home-schooling was considered as a positive change for all mothers who took this step, it offered a limited chance for mothers to receive a break from the intensities of their children. Furthermore, although the mothers were engaged in active problem-solving, often in doing so they were also making tremendous sacrifices, with some mothers driving long distances each day for their children to attend gifted classes.

Studies on the impact of exhaustion on parents report many negative effects of exhaustion, such as associations with high levels of depression, anxiety and parenting stress (Dunning & Giallo, 2012; Giallo et al., 2011; Shen, Barbera, & Shapiro, 2006). With that in mind, parents of intellectually gifted children who report enduring exhaustion could present as an at risk population for mental health disorders and stress. Although Rimlinger's (2016) study did not measure parental exhaustion, it is possible that enduring exhaustion was factor in the high levels of parenting stress and anxiety present in Rimlinger's (2016) participants. These results highlight the need for attention to be given to the needs of the parents of gifted children to ensure they have access to appropriate services and support.

Rimlinger (2016) proposed that the negative psychological effects of raising gifted children were likely to have been compounded by a general lack of understanding of giftedness and lack of compassion for the difficulties parents face. The results of this study support Rimlinger's proposition. A lack of understanding of giftedness was a significant factor relating to poorer wellbeing across all dimensions presented in this study; psychological, family, social and service. All parents when asked what they would like to see change in New Zealand, described the need for further training or education in giftedness for educators and practitioners, or a general increase in awareness of giftedness within New Zealand society. With no consensus among theorists, researchers, or New Zealand government agencies on what giftedness is (Dai, 2018; Ministry of Education, 2012; Moltzen, Jolly & Jarvis, 2018), it is hardly surprising that there is a lack of an accurate understanding about giftedness and the challenges faced by mothers raising gifted children.

For the mothers in this study, the lack of understanding of their experiences was exasperated by the stigma all mothers perceived was associated with the gifted label. The stigma and stereotyping of intellectual giftedness prevented the mothers from speaking about the challenges and joys they experienced raising gifted children, even with others close to them such as extended family and friends. The lack of open and free discussion about giftedness could be a contributing factor preventing new and more accurate knowledge of giftedness from being disseminated widely, and therefore the stereotypes and stigma remain unchanged overtime. Creating more awareness of the realities of giftedness in order to initiate a cultural shift in thinking around giftedness within New Zealand society is needed to break this circulatory pattern. This would be best initiated and run through a national body rather than by mothers who already have the scales tipped with a pile up of demands that already exceed their resources. Creating a holistic understanding of giftedness at a national level may assist mothers to feel more comfortable speaking up and requesting support for themselves.

The findings from this study indicate that the strains of raising an intellectually gifted child are far broader than the influence of the child's advanced intellect alone. Instead, challenges and joys for mothers encompassed many of the behavioural and affective

characteristics associated with the lived experience of being gifted, such as overexcitabilities, asynchrononous development and heightened intensities. This finding highlights the appropriateness of holistic definitions of giftedness such as that put forward by the Columbus Group (1991, as cited in Tolan & Piechowski, 2012). When compared to definitions which focus on intellectual potential and performance alone, the Columbus Group definition is more useful for gaining an appreciation and understanding of the experiences of parents of intellectually gifted children.

New Zealand does not have a national definition of giftedness, instead leaving the decision about what giftedness is for each school to ascertain (Ministry of Education, 2012). While this provides schools with flexibility, the findings of this study indicate that this could also create misunderstanding and inconsistency in identification and provision for gifted children and cause frustration for mothers navigating the school system. Broadening understandings about what it means to be gifted beyond intellect alone and ensuring consistency in schoolwide definitions which include behavioural and affective characteristics common to gifted children may help reduce some of the stereotyping, stigma and social isolation felt by mothers.

Bronfenbrenner and Morris' (2006) chronosystem in the bioecological framework was utilized in this study as a theoretical model that draws attention to the impact of time in history on an individual's development. It is important to highlight the time period of this study in relation to the current educational and social milieu in New Zealand. This study was conducted during a time when the New Zealand education system withdrew targeted funding, professional development and support for gifted education (Riley & Bicknell, 2013). The education milieu in New Zealand was a significant factor contributing to the stress, anxiety and exhaustion felt by all mothers in this study.

Similar to other international (Free, 2016; Renati et al., 2017) and New Zealand (Chellapan & Margrain, 2013) based research, mothers all felt frustration at the lack resources and inflexibility within the school system, and many had been disregarded when offering help, support or expert knowledge about their child. Many mothers felt the impact

of macro-level systemic factors such as government policies and funding activities and the trickle-down effects of these on access to appropriate services. These findings indicate that some of the issues impacting negatively on the well-being of mothers of intellectually gifted children in New Zealand are influenced by complex distal systems beyond their control and the control of individual teachers. To impact the deeply entrenched negative attitudes toward intellectual giftedness held in New Zealand society (Moltzen, 2011; Tapper, 2014; Wong & Morton, 2017), multi-level systemic change may be required and is indicated in the findings of this study.

When considering the strains outlined in this study it is evident that the mothers described many experiences with schools, family, friends, and their children that were strikingly similar. This similarity is even more striking when considering the ages of the children, stages of life, the number of gifted children, and parts of the country they were living in were wide-ranging. It seems that raising gifted children is an experience characterised by exhaustion, stress, and anxiety regardless of the influence of other factors that may differentiate the participants of this study, and regardless of the resources and adaptive coping behaviours the mothers had.

The mothers in this study described multiple protective factors that may have been buffers to the negative impacts of strains on psychological well-being. For example, the mother's ability to access costly educational testing for their children, pay for specialty one-day-school programs, extracurricular activities, engage in home-schooling or moving schools multiple times suggests the mothers in this study may have been at a financial advantage. Furthermore, many mothers were well-educated and some had engaged in further formal education on giftedness and gifted education. We know from research that financial advantage and parental education are important protective factors for well-being (e.g. Ladin, 2008; Luo & Waite, 2005). This suggests that the strains these mothers experienced may have been magnified even more if mothers did not have the financial resources to stop working and care for their children full-time, pay for special one-day-schools and other extracurricular activities. The fact that the mothers in this study were experiencing

tremendous exhaustion, as well as anxiety, and stress despite their protective factors, is concerning and highlights the urgent need for multi-level action to reduce strain factors.

Rimlinger (2016) in her study utilised common psychometric questionnaires to ascertain the impact raising gifted children had on parents. Rimlinger (2016) noted the limitations of this methodology for providing an understanding of the reasons behind the elevated levels of stress and anxiety she found. The results of this study support the use of a qualitative methodology to understand the complexity of the impact of raising an intellectually gifted child on maternal well-being. The richness of the data gathered in this study and the ability to examine complex systems that impact development over time was made possible by the use of semi-structured interviews. It is important that future research continues to explore and examine the well-being of parents to ascertain the types of supports or interventions required to ameliorate the strains that impact negatively on the mothers of gifted children. Qualitative methods should be used to compliment quantitative methods as it can provide researchers with a holistic understanding of the reasons for quantitative findings.

5.2 Maternal Resources

When considering previous research (Rimlinger, 2016; Free, 2017; Renati et al., 2017; Chellapan & Margrain, 2013) the results of this study provide greater insight and detail about the complete experience of raising a gifted child by not only examining the strains parents encounter, but by drawing attention to the resources and coping behaviours that mothers use to manage these strains. The utility of gaining knowledge of these positive experiences and benefits cannot be underestimated. As noted by Konrad (2006), a deeper understanding of the gains mothers extract from challenges contributes to “the complexity, richness, and fuller appreciation of our understanding of the caregiver experience” (p.109). The exploration of personal growth and benefits arising from challenges is commonly espoused in the disability literature (Patterson & McGubbin, 1983; Patterson, 2002), however, this is the first known study to explore these ideas within the context of giftedness.

All mothers reported positive experiences and impacts raising a gifted child. The findings indicated that positive gains and personal growth often occurred in tandem with the strains of raising a gifted child. The pile-up of demands and strains drew out resources the mothers already had or resulted in mothers gaining new resources and this may have been required even more because of the lack of support around them. The experience of raising a gifted child actually built character in the mothers as they were required to take ownership of the situation and their parenting. It's likely these mothers have a high self-efficacy in catering and supporting their children. It is probable that due to the processes they've gone through to raise a gifted child, the mother's knowledge of giftedness was such that they could be a rich source of support and resource for teachers. The results indicated that this was not that case, with many teachers disregarding mothers' knowledge and offer of support and therefore missing opportunities to work together with mothers to best support the gifted children. Indeed, teachers who were noted as exemplary by mothers were those that listened, were flexible and worked in collaboration with parents, thus reducing a source of stress, anxiety and exhaustion for the mother.

An interesting finding and one that has not been explored in the literature to date is the impact of the mother's own giftedness on her experiences of parenting an intellectually gifted child. Although the interview questions did not explicitly ask mothers about their own giftedness, it was still a key theme relating to positive impacts the mothers reported. Many mothers discovered for the first time their own intellectual giftedness through the identification of their children. These mothers reported gaining a greater understanding of themselves and about the context of their own educational and childhood experiences. It is probable that these discoveries impacted the voracity with which these mothers advocated for the rights of their children. The findings indicated that mothers were intent on advocating for their children's needs despite this strain contributing to the exhaustion and stress they experienced. Furthermore, the advanced intellect of the mothers in this study may have contributed to their ability to access or create resources to support their gifted child.

Mothers described social isolation as having the greatest negative impact on their well-being. The idea that social isolation is a contributing factor to the stress and anxiety

mothers of gifted children face was espoused in the research by Free (2017), Rimlinger (2016), Renati et al. (2017), Chellapan and Margrain (2013) and is further supported by the results of the present investigation. Mothers in this study indicated that they often used and relied on social media closed groups to cope with the effects of social isolation they experienced. Closed Facebook groups for parents of gifted children were noted as a valuable source of support for all mothers in this study. It was a safe space where they were able to feel a sense of belonging, share freely and without judgement the daily struggles of raising gifted children and seek support and resources in times of need. It seems that due to the general lack of formal and community support systems that are visible and accessible to mothers of gifted children, other mothers of gifted children have created these closed groups. Their effectiveness could be attributed to the ability of social media groups to break down barriers of time and geography that often constrain access to face-to-face social support. Future research is needed to explore the reasons why social media support groups are both highly popular and also effective. This information could be used to create more effective community led support systems.

It is important to acknowledge that reports of positive experiences, personal growth, and benefits does not detract from some of the negative experiences all mothers in this study describe. In no way does the reporting of the positives take away from the frustration, anxiety, stress, and exhaustion many mothers are experiencing daily in their role as a mother of an intellectually gifted child. While the mothers in this study all spoke of positive impacts, the primary themes that came out of the interviews related to the negative impacts raising a gifted child had on their wellbeing. The following quote by Judy, a mother of three gifted children, sums up the imbalance of demands to resources that all mothers in this study described.

The challenge is not quite equated by the rewards yet, but that is always going to be the case as long as giftedness is not identified in its full capacity and the full context, then your rewards are always going to be offset by the challenges.

5.3 Implications

This research has many implications for future research as well as for those who work directly with gifted families through to those in policy making positions. First, this research comes at an important time in the history of gifted education in New Zealand. After many years of a lack of funding for, and recognition of giftedness as an area requiring special attention within the education system, a new government in 2018 has shone the light back on giftedness (Ministry of Education, 2019). The beginning of 2019 marks the rolling out of a new set of initiatives to facilitate identification, resources, funding and professional development for educators in New Zealand schools (Ministry of Education, 2019). The impact of a new government and the new initiatives could reduce a major source of strain for mothers of intellectually gifted children who in this study, which was conducted prior to the implementation of the initiatives, cite exhaustion, stress and anxiety in their dealings with schools. Replication of aspects of this study in future years could provide comparative data to consider the impact these government initiatives have had on the experiences of mothers of gifted children in New Zealand. Using bioecological theory in future research to trace this macrosystem change, through to the exosystem and finally to the microsystem of parents could provide valuable information on the efforts and processes required to make systemic change that positively impacts the lives of individuals.

Furthermore, these findings are important in informing educators and policy makers about the personal experiences that mothers have in raising their gifted children. These findings could be utilised to educate teachers and other professionals such as psychologists and general practitioners so that they are more aware of how raising gifted children impacts a mother's wellbeing. This might help reduce some of the negative stereotyping and stigmatisation of intellectual giftedness that is evident within New Zealand society.

Another important implication of this study is indicated in the findings on services for mothers of gifted children. The support available to the mothers in this study was often established by other mothers of gifted children who needed support, or by mothers who have taken the initiative to support other mothers because they didn't have the support they needed when they were going through the process of raising their gifted children. The lack of

support services were another source of stress and exhaustion, particularly for those mothers acting as consumers and providers of support. There is a tremendous need to provide community funded and facilitated support services for parents of gifted children such as those available to parents of children with disabilities and other exceptionalities.

Lastly, this research can help raise awareness of the risk of maternal exhaustion, anxiety and stress for mothers of gifted children. It can help clinicians working with families of gifted children to understand the factors that impact upon the wellbeing of mothers of gifted children and also raises awareness of the positive impacts and strengths mothers of gifted children have. An understanding of the positive experiences of mothers of gifted children can assist clinicians in providing positive psychological-based interventions. It is important for professionals assessing giftedness to understand that this may be the first time the parents of gifted children become aware of the possibility of their own giftedness. The parents too may need support as they work through the process of understanding their own giftedness.

5.4 Strengths and Limitations

The strength of this study is that it provides a rich description of the experiences of a group of New Zealand mothers raising intellectually gifted children. It contributes to the small pool of existing literature on the challenges parents of gifted children face and provides new insights into mother's positive experiences and coping behaviours.

While purposive sampling and the qualitative methodology used for this study provided rich detail about a range of experiences regarding raising gifted children, these methods also resulted in limitations. First, the sample was limited to volunteers within New Zealand who were raising gifted children aged 6 to 16-years-old with a formal assessment of intellectual giftedness. Therefore, we cannot assume that their experiences necessarily represent all mothers who have or will have an intellectually gifted child. Furthermore, the findings only detail the experience of mothers of gifted children, the study was originally designed to explore the experience of parents. However, this was not possible as no fathers volunteered to participate. This may be due to women serving as primary caregivers more

often than men and it is a common problem highlighted in other studies that include parents of gifted children (Free, 2017; Rimlinger, 2016). Future research should incorporate the voices of New Zealand fathers of gifted children as well.

Another limitation of this study is the lack of demographic information gathered from the participants. Information was not gathered on mother's socio-economic status, ethnicity, education, or age and this information could be valuable when comparing the results of this study to previous or future research on parents of gifted children and for application of the results. While socio-economic status information was not gathered, it is probable that mothers that participated in this study were of middle to high socio-economic status due to the requirement to have had a formal assessment of giftedness conducted on their child in order to participate. The process of gaining a formal cognitive assessment is costly, therefore it is probable that families from lower socio-economic backgrounds did not have their voices heard in this study.

The experiences of a mother of gifted children who experience financial hardship may differ from families who experience financial advantage, as has been highlighted through research on gifted children (Ballam, 2009). Ballam (2009) found that gifted children from low socio-economic backgrounds were underrepresented and under-recognised within New Zealand. The effect of poverty and the conditions associated with it can have a significant impact on the realisation of a gifted child's potential in the New Zealand context (Ballman, 2009). Therefore, future research should consider the impact raising a child has on mothers from lower socio-economic backgrounds. With these limitations in mind caution must be taken when considering the application of these results across a range of demographics.

Finally, while purposive sampling resulted in parents who identified strongly with the gifted label, it is possible that mothers who volunteered for this study are fundamentally different (e.g. mothers who are possibly more active and involved in support groups, advocacy initiatives etc.) than other mothers of gifted children. It is also possible that some parents with gifted children do not value or identify with the gifted label and it is

probable that those parents would not volunteer for a study such as this or belong to the closed Facebook groups where the study was advertised.

5.5 Conclusions

This study makes a valuable contribution to the paucity of current literature on the experiences of mothers of gifted children. The results provide further evidence of the unique challenges many mothers of gifted children face and the impact these challenges have on their well-being. The research described in this thesis provides the first known investigation into the positive impacts of raising a gifted child. Furthermore, it appears to be the first examination of the coping behaviours New Zealand mothers of gifted children employ to mediate the strains they experience and is the first known study to have utilised the FAAR model within the study on giftedness.

This thesis makes a valuable contribution to the literature by highlighting the dialectical processes between the demands mothers experience and the resulting personal growth and positive coping behaviours associated with parenting a gifted child. The importance of highlighting the positive experiences of parents of gifted children cannot be underestimated. Shining a light on the positive gains, benefits and adaptive coping patterns did not detract from the tremendous daily strains mothers in this study experienced but instead resulted in a fuller appreciation and understanding of the complexity and richness of their parenting experiences. Because this research was exploratory and its aims were broad, the results provide many more questions than answers. Further research is recommended to consider the experiences of fathers, to gain a greater understanding regarding parent's discovery of their own giftedness, the intergenerational impact of giftedness in families, and the experience of parents from diverse socio-economic and cultural backgrounds. Further qualitative and quantitative research is recommended that include a comparison group of parents of typically developing children to further delineate the similarities and differences between the parental experiences of typical and atypical populations. Finally, this research is occurring at a pivotal time in the history of gifted education in New Zealand. It is with interest we watch the effect of the new government initiatives and the impact these may have on the lives of gifted children and their families in New Zealand. Replication of aspects of this study

in future years may provide knowledge of the impact these initiatives have had on mothers of gifted children in New Zealand.

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Appendix A - Ethics Approval



HUMAN ETHICS COMMITTEE

Secretary, Rebecca Robinson
Telephone: +64 03 369 4588, Extn 94588
Email: human-ethics@canterbury.ac.nz

Ref: HEC 2018/66

27 July 2018

Jade McDowall
Health Sciences
UNIVERSITY OF CANTERBURY

Dear Jade

The Human Ethics Committee advises that your research proposal "Raising a Gifted Child: Exploring the Experiences of Parents" has been considered and approved.

Please note that this approval is subject to the incorporation of the amendments you have provided in your email of 18th July 2018.

Best wishes for your project.

Yours sincerely

R. Robinson
pp.

Professor Jane Maidment
Chair
University of Canterbury Human Ethics Committee

Appendix B - Information For Participants



Department: Child and Family Psychology
Email: jade.mcdowall@pg.canterbury.ac.nz
July 17, 2018

"Exploring the Experiences of Parents of Gifted Children"

Information Sheet for Parents/Caregivers of Gifted Children

My name is Jade McDowall and I am a Masters student in the Child and Family Psychology programme at the University of Canterbury. I am wanting to explore the experiences of parents raising an intellectually gifted child to better understand the effects on parents and their families. For the purposes of this project, intellectual giftedness is defined as exceptional performance, or potential to perform at a level that places the child within the top 10% when compared to same aged peers, in one or more areas on a formal assessment of intellectual ability.

If you choose to take part in this study, your involvement in this project will be an individual semi-structured interview to discuss your perceptions and experiences regarding parenting your gifted child/ren. Interviews will take approximately 45-60mins. Suitable times for the interviews will be negotiated upon receipt of consent forms. Interviews will be audiotaped and transcribed. Transcripts of the interviews will be sent out to you for comment and/or correction to assist in the accurate recording and interpretation of your views. You can choose not to have the interview audiotaped, in this case all answers to questions will be written down.

Due to the personal nature of the interview, it is acknowledged that there may be some risk of distress while sharing your experiences. In order to minimise this risk, it will be made clear prior to the interview that you do not have to answer any question you do not wish to answer, and if you feel any distress during the interview, the interview will be stopped and only continued with your verbal consent. After the interview you will receive a pamphlet outlining online and local gifted parent groups and agencies that can provide support.

Participation is voluntary, and you have the right to withdraw at any stage without penalty. You may ask for your raw data to be returned to you or destroyed at any point. If you withdraw, I will remove information relating to you. However, once analysis of raw data starts in October, it will become increasingly difficult to remove your data.

The results of the project may be published, but you can be assured of the complete confidentiality of data gathered in this investigation: your identity will not be made public. To ensure anonymity and confidentiality, any identifying information will be removed from the data and pseudonyms will be used in any publications or reports. Only my supervisors, Cara Swit and Myron Friesen and I will have access to the data. Audio from interviews will be deleted once transcribed, and transcripts will be stored in password-protected facilities and locked storage at the University of Canterbury for five years after the study, before being

destroyed. A thesis is a public document and will be available through the UCLibrary. All participants will receive a copy of the summary of results of the project.

The project is being carried out as a requirement for the degree of Master of Arts, by Jade McDowall under the supervision of Cara Swit, who can be contacted at cara.swit@canterbury.ac.nz. She will be pleased to discuss any concerns you may have about participation in the project.

This project has been reviewed and approved by the University of Canterbury Human Ethics Committee, and participants should address any complaints to The Chair, Human Ethics Committee, University of Canterbury, Private Bag 4800, Christchurch (human-ethics@canterbury.ac.nz).

If you agree to participate in the study, you are asked to complete the consent form and return to me. Thank you very much for considering contributing to my Master's thesis project.

Yours sincerely,

Jade McDowall
jade.mcdowall@pg.canterbury.ac.nz

Appendix C - Consent Form



Department: Child and Family Psychology
Email: jade.mcdowall@pg.canterbury.ac.nz

"Exploring the Experiences of Parents of Gifted Children"

Consent Form

If you agree to participate in this study, please tick the boxes next to each of the statements below to confirm that you have read and understood the information.

- ☐ I have been given a full explanation of this project and have had the opportunity to ask questions.
- ☐ I understand that taking part in this project involves an individual 45-60 minute semi-structured interview.
- ☐ I understand audio from the interview will be recorded and transcribed.
- ☐ I understand that participation is voluntary and I may withdraw at any time without penalty. Withdrawal of participation will also include the withdrawal of any information I have provided should this remain practically achievable.
- ☐ I understand that any information or opinions I provide will be kept confidential to the researcher and supervisor and that any published or reported results will not identify the participants. I understand that a thesis is a public document and will be available through the UC Library.
- ☐ I understand that all data collected for the study will be kept in locked and secure facilities and/or in password protected electronic form and will be destroyed after five years.
- ☐ I understand that I can contact the researcher Jade McDowall at jade.mcdowall@pg.canterbury.ac.nz or the supervisor Cara Swit at cara.swit@canterbury.ac.nz for further information. If I have any complaints, I can contact the Chair of the University of Canterbury Human Ethics Committee, Private Bag 4800, Christchurch (human-ethics@canterbury.ac.nz)
- ☐ I would like to receive a summary of the results of this project.
- ☐ By signing below, I agree to participate in this research project.

Name:

Signed:

Email:

Date:

Appendix D - Participant Advert

Participate in Research

Parents' experiences raising a gifted child



Who?

Parents/caregivers of
intellectually gifted children
aged 6 to 16 years old

What?

Share your thoughts about parenting your gifted child

How?

Through a semi-structured interview

Why?

To understand the challenges
and joys of parenting
intellectually gifted children

Contact us for more information

Email: jade.mcdowall@pg.canterbury.ac.nz

Appendix E - Interview Schedule

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Q1-Who is being interviewed – mother/father/other

Q2-Could you tell me the age, birth order and gender of the first child identified as gifted?

Q3-Do you have any other children? What are their ages and gender?

How many of your children have been identified as gifted?

GIFTEDNESS

Q4-Tell me how you define giftedness

Q5-Tell me about your journey discovering your child was gifted? What was that like for you?

CHALLENGES AND JOYS

Q6 -Tell me about your experiences raising your gifted child/ren.

PROMPT- Tell me about any positive/ joyful experiences

PROMPT – Tell me about any challenging experiences

Q7- Tell me about your experiences with teachers, principals, G.A.T.E coordinators

PROMPT- Tell me about any positive experiences

PROMPT – Tell me about any challenging experiences

Q8- Tell me about your experiences with other professionals and community organisations such as plunket, doctors, hospitals, dentists or through extracurricular activities, clubs, groups.

PROMPT – Tell me about any positive experiences

PROMPT – Tell me about any challenging experiences

Q9- Tell me about your relationships with your immediate family, your friends and extended family.

PROMPT – Tell me about any positive experiences

PROMPT- Tell me about any challenging experiences

WELL-BEING

Q10- Tell me about your own well-being and how it may have been impacted by raising a gifted child.

PROMPT – Tell me about how raising a gifted child has positively impacted your wellbeing.

PROMPT – Tell me about any times you have felt resentment/ anger/ stress/ anxiety/ lonely/ unhappy

PROMPT – Tell me about any times you have felt more / less confident you were able to meet your own or your child's needs.

COPING

Q11- Tell me about any of the resources and supports you currently access or have accessed in the past for yourself

PROMPT – What are the key people / organisations / social media you access on a regular basis?

Q12- Tell me about your experience with these supports

Q13- Tell me about the most useful resources/ supports

Q14- Tell me about the least useful resources/supports

END

Q15- Tell me about what you believe to be the most positive aspect of raising a gifted child.

Q16- Tell me about what you believe to be the most challenging aspect of raising a gifted child.

Q17- Tell me about what aspect of raising a gifted child has had the most impact on you and your wellbeing

Q18-What other questions should I have asked that I did not?

Q19- Is there anything else you would like to tell me?